



Accommodating College ESL Learner Communication Needs:
Perceptions, Policies, and Practices

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to determine how the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs in one southern Ontario community college could more effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs. The literature review examined (a) linguistic issues, such as language testing and second-language learning theories, (b) organizational matters, such as ESL curriculum and teacher training, and (c) affective issues, such as motivation for second-language learning, learning styles, and the student-teacher relationship. I gathered perceptual data from the programs' administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners. Eleven participants took part in individual interviews or a focus group session. The results suggest that ESL learners need assistance with discipline-specific vocabulary and cultural nuances. College ESL learners' weak communicative competence, together with misleading acceptance standards for ESL learners and limited support available to faculty members and to students, decrease opportunities for successful completion of the programs. The results point to re-assessment of the college's admission policies and procedures, program evaluation practices that consider the needs of ESL learners, discipline-specific language support, and strategies to enhance the ESL student-teacher relationship. The study highlights theory relating to ESL learners' self-perception and engagement, as well as the importance of including the voice of college ESL learners in educational research. The results suggest that despite ESL learners' perseverance in completing their studies, power imbalances remain. The college has yet to implement organizational strategies such as discipline-specific communications and ESL courses and extended language support that could meet the communication needs of ESL learners in the two programs.

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CHAPTER ONE: CONTEXT OF THE INQUIRY

Learner demographics in southern Ontario community colleges reflect the multilingualistic communities which these colleges serve. Examining learner demographics from an English as a second language (ESL) perspective sheds light on learner communication needs. In this study, I explore the communication needs of college ESL learners within discipline-specific programs in southern Ontario. The purpose of this research was to investigate the perceptions of stakeholders involved in the issue of ESL learners' needs in southern Ontario community college programs. Specifically, this inquiry examined the perspectives of college program administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners in two programs in a southern Ontario college. On a microlevel, it is a formative evaluation (Chen, 2005) of one southern Ontario college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs in relation to ESL learner needs; on a macrolevel, it provides insights into the academic experiences of ESL college learners in general.

Background of the Study

This section provides the context for the study and will focus on the following aspects: (a) the role of community colleges concerning immigrant learners, (b) college learner demographics, and (c) college ESL instruction and bridge courses. The term ESL college learner in the context of this study means an individual who has recently immigrated to Canada and has English as his or her second language. The aspects making up the background of the problem provide the basis for a better understanding of this inquiry.

The Role of Community Colleges Concerning Immigrant Learners

The role of Ontario community colleges is to provide workforce training and retraining to meet industry and community needs (ACAATO, 2006a). Southern Ontario colleges provide several programs to meet these needs. The Association of Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology of Ontario (ACAATO) is an association whose purpose is to advocate for and market the programs of colleges of applied arts and technology in Ontario. ACAATO's mandate is to advance an effective college system for Ontario. It represents the joint views of college boards, chairs, and presidents. Every year, ACAATO publishes an Environmental Scan, providing a synopsis of key trends which will have an impact on Ontario's colleges in the future, assisting them in their advocacy and strategic planning processes. One aspect of this scan addresses workforce challenges of the 21st century, mainly globalization, and suggests that a flexible college system needs to be in place to meet the diverse needs of learners (ACAATO), such as immigrant college students.

Healy (1998, cited in ACAATO, 2006a) proposes that investment in education and training helps form the human capital – the skills and abilities- that is a vital element in assuring economic growth and individual advancement and reducing inequality. It is an important element in combating unemployment and social exclusion. (p.126)

Therefore, exploring college programs in terms of ESL learner communication needs may help to better understand how to foster social inclusion and equity of academic and economic opportunity.

In response to the Rae Review Report on Ontario's postsecondary education system, the current Ontario government has outlined several priorities for improving the province's college system. One of these priorities is that Ontario colleges need to focus on "improving the education assessment process for integrating new immigrants into the workforce" (ACAATO, 2006a, p. 149). This is important because Ontario's growth is affected by immigration levels: 53% of the total number of immigrants that came to Canada in 2005 settled in Ontario (ACAATO). However, Zhu (2005) reports that a number of "post-immigration barriers prevent immigrant integration" (p. 8), with one significant barrier being "insufficient official language proficiency" (p. 8). Investigating college ESL learner communication needs could help break down such integration barriers.

College Learner Demographics

According to ACAATO (2006a), 18% of surveyed college applicants in 2005 were not born in Canada, with 15% of students having a first language other than English or French. Furthermore, 37% of students have come to Canada in the past 5 years. Immigrant students (defined as individuals who have recently immigrated to Canada) are older than other applicants (over 25 years of age), have dependent children, report lower family incomes, and have a higher degree of concern for finding employment after graduation than other applicants. These demographics imply that in order for these learners to succeed academically and economically, college programs must be responsive to these learners' specific language needs.

College ESL Instruction and Bridge Courses

ESL instruction at the college level is offered in two main streams, depending on the language needs of the learner. First, new Canadians are offered free English language instruction through the Learning Instruction for New Canadians (LINC) program sponsored by the Canadian government that is based on specific language benchmarks. Second, if a learner completes or exceeds the final stage of benchmarks, then the learner can take additional courses offered by various postsecondary institutions, such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP)—a bridge course which focuses on preparing the learner for more rigorous language use associated with postsecondary programs.

Problem Situation

Immigration to Canada is based on a points system. Immigrants are coming into Canada with higher levels of English proficiency, but the problem is that when they search for a job in their professions, most do not know the professional language, jargon, and culture of their occupation (Fragomeni, 2007). According to Fragomeni, a recent study of 17 LINC language class sites found that they do not meet the professional immigrants' needs. Job-specific language skills are required of immigrants seeking jobs in professions such as medicine and pharmacy (Fragomeni). This inquiry assists in articulating what the communication needs of ESL college learners seeking diplomas in these professions are.

Colleges Integrating Immigrants to Employment (CIITE), a study funded by the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration of the Government of Ontario exploring the issue of immigrant integration, has identified problems with the role community colleges play in providing “pathways from pre-entry through employment transition and into the

workforce” (CIITE, 2004, p. 9). The purpose of the CIITE study was to determine how to improve access to southern Ontario college programs. In Phase 1 of the study, the authors found that

Ontario colleges do not have common language benchmarks Current tools test only academic language proficiency - reading and writing - rather than the four language skills needed to progress through college programs and in the workplace. As such, language assessments may determine eligibility to enter a college or be placed in language courses, but may not provide accurate feedback on an individual’s ability to function in the program of instruction or workplace. (CIITE, p. 13)

In other words, even though ESL learners are accepted into college programs, the success rate for completion of the program and subsequent work placement is dependent on communication skills: not only skills such as reading and writing, but also listening and speaking . Yet, colleges accept ESL learners into rigorous full-time programs mainly because of funding. A college receives 100% funding for learners enrolled in full-time programs as opposed to 60% funding for part-time learners (CIITE). These full-time programs require that the learners be capable academically and linguistically of achieving learning outcomes. CIITE’s aim is to move college programs “toward institutionalizing or embedding appropriate, sustainable sector-specific bridging modules, courses and programs into college offerings” (p. 15) that will assist ESL college learners with reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills.

I have observed several things over the past 10 years teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) within various programs at the college level which parallel ACAATO’s

(2006a) and CIITE's (2004) findings. I have found that most ESL learners are highly educated (ACAATO confirms through student surveys that 44% of ESL learners in colleges hold university degrees). But, unfortunately, their credentials are not recognized by some Canadian professional organizations or employers. This has forced learners to pursue degrees within the college system in order to gain Canadian credentials and experience (CIITE).

As well, I have taught a communications course for 5 years through a college's continuing education program. This course is meant to prepare students for further studies. I observed that many ESL students were coming from different disciplines and needed ESL instruction related to their field of study or discipline. I have also taught in a southern Ontario college's School of Business, International Business (IB) postgraduate program. With 57% of international students enrolling in college business programs (ACAATO, 2006a) and with only a 67% IB student satisfaction rate in the program's teaching of communication skills (ACAATO, 2006b), the college's IB program co-ordinator saw a need for an ESL course geared towards international business. Providing ESL instruction within discipline-specific college programs supports Healy's (1998, cited in ACAATO, 2006a) and Zhu's (2005) notion of building up Ontario's human capital, particularly when Ontario provides services for the rest of the country and an increasing number of international clients because of globalization (ACAATO, 2006a; Zhu).

Within the process of program evaluation, the IB program co-ordinator organized focus groups to discuss the possibility of including a discipline-specific ESL course. I facilitated the focus groups. The results indicated that from the students' perspective, culture and communication skills are important in the Canadian workforce. If this is the

case, I suspect that these findings would apply, in whole or part, to other ESL learners in similar college programs.

Problem Statement

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, understand, and describe how the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician college programs can more effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs. The four questions are:

1. What are the communication needs of ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs?
2. Are there any limitations in the ESL preparation program currently in place for college ESL learners? If so, what are these limitations?
3. What kinds of curriculum and instructional accommodations should these programs consider in order to better foster ESL learners' communication skills?
4. What kinds of organizational interventions are most effective in assisting college ESL learners in Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs?

In order to focus on potential answers to these research questions, the following terms need to be clarified:

1. curriculum in the context of this study refers to specific content covered in courses, the types of courses offered in the programs, and the timing of courses;
2. instructional refers to teaching strategies;
3. organizational refers to the colleges' policies and procedures;

4. perspective refers to an individual's point of view based on his or her experience with college ESL learners' communication needs;
5. perception refers to what an individual understands to be true with respect to college ESL learners' communication needs.

Theoretical Framework

Theoretical frameworks in qualitative research outline a study's epistemology, purpose, and methodology (Merriam, 1998). In qualitative research, theoretical frameworks have the important role of making the researcher's epistemological beliefs explicit. According to Spiegelberg (1965, cited in Merriam), a qualitative researcher aims to grasp the essence of an experience by first investigating several examples of the phenomenon. Several examples of this phenomenon came from the stakeholders involved in and affected by this issue, thus constructing an understanding of the phenomenon from various points of view. This study is framed by a generic qualitative approach (Merriam), influenced by the constructivist perspective and critical theorist perspective. Looking at this issue using a blend of perspectives provides a clearer picture of the phenomenon being examined (see Figure 1).

A constructivist approach fits under the interpretive paradigm and looks at knowledge as subjective and based on one's experiences: "What people know and believe to be true about the world is constructed- or made up- as people interact with one another over time in specific social settings" (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, cited in Anfara & Mertz, 2006, p. 33). The study constructed and analyzed the multiple perspectives of administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners based on responses to

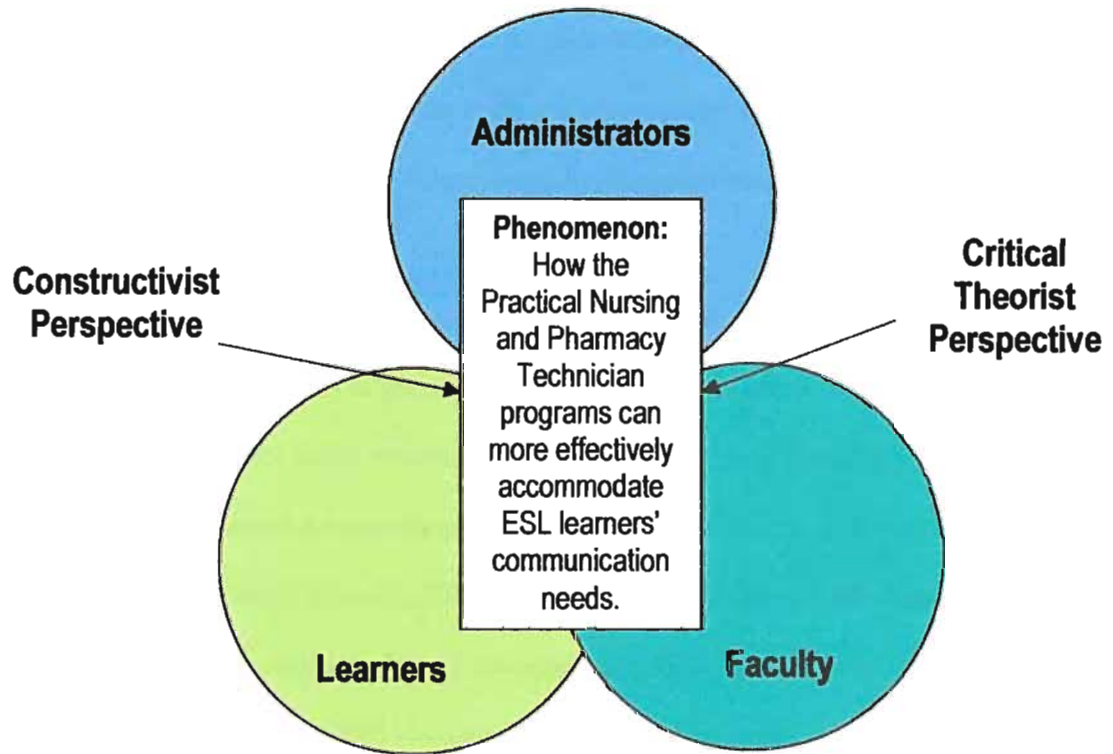


Figure 1. Theoretical framework: A blend of perspectives.

the four research questions raised in the Problem Statement section. In doing so, I aimed to uncover relationships between the essences of the phenomenon (Speigelberg, 1965, cited in Merriam, 1998), which then allowed for the phenomenon to be looked at from a critical perspective.

A critical paradigm has, first, methodological implications (Creswell, 1998) in that the aim of this study is to give voice to all stakeholders and to contextualize “these experiences within the social system” (Hoodfar, 1997, p. 212). And, second, a critical perspective encourages a commitment “to social criticism and the empowerment of individuals” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 160). In Freire’s view, “education has the power to transform existing political, economic and legal oppression in society” (Magro, 2001, p. 87). Fairclough (2001) however suggests that language is implicated in the service of power. Therefore, by taking a critical perspective on the research questions, I identify the power dynamics involved in seeking to improve practices and policies that might be most effective in assisting college ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

Rationale for the Study

According to Colleges Ontario (2007), 14% of college students are enrolled in health sciences programs. I chose the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs for this study because I have taught and observed students in these health sciences programs for 10 years. Recently, I noticed that the majority of students from the Pharmacy Technician program have English as their second language. During informal discussions with faculty members teaching in the Practical Nursing and in the Pharmacy Technician programs, I discovered that learner demographics for these programs reflect a

high number of ESL learners. Faculty members articulated the concern that ESL learners are having difficulty completing the programs or finding work placement. They also expressed a need to better understand the communication needs of ESL learners in discipline-specific programs. Consequently, the inquiry will help the college community further understand the communication needs of ESL learners in these two programs.

A recent study by Bailey (2006, cited in Carhill, 2008) looked at ESL learners in kindergarten to grade 12, and the results suggest that there is an association between English language proficiency and academic literacy. The results of Bailey's study inform the rationale for my study in that my study examines the relationship between language skills and academic success.

In addition, in the field of research on postsecondary ESL programs, many studies have been conducted from the administrators' and faculty members' perspective, but few have included the learners' perspective (Carkin, 2005). Hence, this study focuses on the perspectives of the key stakeholders involved in the issue: the program administrators, faculty members, and ESL students from each program. The combination of these three perspectives sheds new light on what changes are necessary to support the communication needs of college ESL learners.

Finally, in my review of related literature, I have not found studies which address the communication needs of ESL learners in nursing and pharmaceutical college programs. As these two programs attract a higher number of ESL learners, this study adds to the body of knowledge relating to college ESL learners in highly demanded programs.

Importance of the Study

Program evaluation at the college level traditionally involves using a formal instrument to measure the effectiveness of a course, such as course evaluation surveys distributed to students at the end of a course. This system reflects a technical approach (Plumb & Welton, 2001) to curriculum evaluation. This type of curriculum evaluation rarely allows for responses which do not fit predetermined categories or questions. Therefore, current evaluation methods do not provide data on learner needs, including the English language communication needs of immigrant students.

In contrast, this research provides a human, multidimensional element to program evaluation. It focuses on a blend of evaluation approaches defined by Aoki (1986) as situational interpretive and critical. The emphasis of such program evaluation methods is on the individuals involved in the central phenomenon and the relationships between them. By describing, interpreting, and understanding the perspectives of stakeholders in the central phenomenon, the study will lead to further understanding of college program practices in terms of ESL learner needs. The high number of ESL learners in these two college programs means that this study will be of interest to college administrators, college program designers, faculty, as well as to college ESL learners interested in Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the role of community colleges is to foster the development of human capital, “those abilities and information that have economic value” (Bouchard, 1998, p. 129). In order for education to advance one’s human capital, however, learners need to succeed in their education goals. Southern Ontario college learner demographics reflect a high number of ESL learners. Colleges can no longer

accept ESL learners into mainstream programs without careful consideration of whether or not the programs can accommodate these learners' communication needs. This study can contribute to (a) educational theories related to motivation in second-language learning, (b) human capital theory related to ESL learners in Canada, and (c) effective curriculum design to assist ESL college learners in attaining and utilizing their human capital.

Also, the CIITE (2004) study has already benchmarked the Practical Nursing program, leading to recommendations for improving the Practical Nursing program to assist ESL learners. In contrast, the Pharmacy Technician program has not been examined. This study, which focuses on the perspectives of the administrators, faculty, and ESL learners in these two programs, contributes to an understanding of how to better accommodate ESL learners in other college programs.

Scope and Limitations of the Inquiry

The scope of this study was restricted to the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs in one southern Ontario college. No other programs were examined, thereby limiting the results.

Including participants from three stakeholder groups allowed for a multitude of perspectives on the phenomenon and gave voice to those involved in the situation. However, using individual interviews and a focus group session limited the number of participants from each stakeholder group. Therefore, the views expressed may not be reflective of all positions held on this issue. Further, in the interest of time and management of data, only 2 faculty members from each program were interviewed, and only ESL learners were invited to participate.

Outline of the Remainder of the Document

In this chapter, I discussed the context of the inquiry: immigrant ESL learners in discipline-specific college programs. The problem situation is that college ESL learners' communication needs are not being met. The combined theoretical frameworks of constructivism and critical theory drive the inquiry's methodology. My experiences with teaching ESL learners in discipline-specific courses define my purpose and rationale in researching how the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician college programs can most effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs. This investigation is important because it provides a human, multidimensional approach to program evaluation which accommodates the communication needs of ESL learners. I concluded this chapter by defining the scope of the inquiry, which is limited to the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs of one southern Ontario college.

Chapter Two of this study is a review of related literature, highlighting themes that inform the inquiry. The literature review presents the results of studies related to three dominant themes: linguistic, organizational, and affective issues surrounding ESL postsecondary learners. These themes are framed using an adaptation of Pratt's (1998) General Model of Teaching. Within this model, the elements of a teaching context are investigated through the relationships between (a) ESL learners and society, (b) ESL learners and the organizational context, (c) ESL learners and the content, (d) ESL learners and the teacher, and (e) teachers and the content.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology and methods used to collect data, framed by the study's theoretical perspectives. The chapter describes a generic qualitative methodology using the transcribed interview (individual and focus group session) as the

main method of data collection. Within this chapter, site and participant selection and data collection and data analysis methods are explained. Assumptions, limitations, credibility issues, and ethical considerations are also presented.

Chapter Four discusses the inquiry's findings. The results of the individual interviews and focus group session are reported, interspersed with anonymous quotations from the individual interviews and focus group session, and organized into themes that emerged from the data.

In Chapter Five, conclusions, suggestions for theory, comparison to previous studies, and implications of the study's findings are discussed. Recommendations for improved practices and interventions involving ESL learners in the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs are presented. Implications for theory and future research are also presented.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This section reviews studies and articles from 1989 to 2006 related to issues associated with ESL learners in postsecondary education. The three main categories are (a) linguistic issues such as assessing language proficiency and second-language learning theories, (b) organizational issues such as ESL curriculum, college course emphasis, and teacher training, and (c) affective factors such as the student-teacher relationship, power differences, and motivation to learning.

The literature review is framed using an adaptation of Pratt's (1998) General Model of Teaching (see Figure 2). Pratt developed this framework as a tool for educators in higher education to articulate their perspective on teaching. Pratt suggests that in any teaching environment there are always the same elements: learners, content, and teacher. What makes this framework adaptable is that it changes depending on the instructors' beliefs, actions, and intentions in relation to the elements within the teaching environment. This framework allows for the exploration of relationships among the elements and has been adapted to suit the focus of this study. In the context of this inquiry's literature review, Pratt's three elements are situated within the organizational context which is, in turn, surrounded by society. This chapter focuses on the following relationships: the perceived relationship between ESL learners and society, ESL learners and the organizational context, ESL learners and the content, ESL learners and their teachers, and teachers and the content.

The Relationship Between ESL Learners and Society

ESL learners seek a college diploma in the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician program, either out of interest or because their international credentials

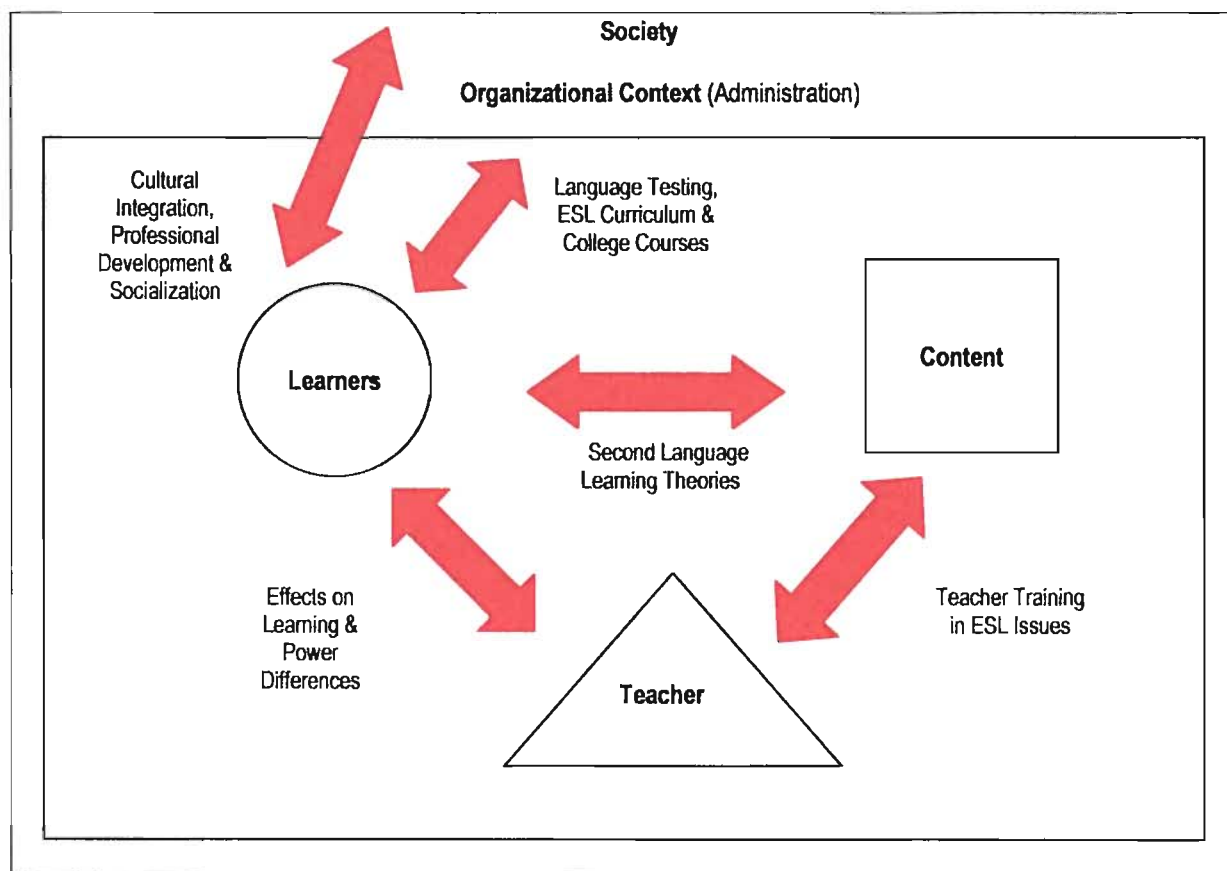


Figure 2. Examining the relationships between elements in teaching college ESL learners.

Note. From *Five perspectives on teaching adult and higher education* (p. 4), by D. D. Pratt, 1998, Malabar, FL: Krieger. Adapted with permission.

in these professions are not recognized in Canada. “Immigrant selection practices since the mid-1990s have given more weight to education and skills, favouring economic immigrants this new shift was based on the assumption that economic immigrants brought more human capital ... and therefore were more valuable and desirable” (Guo, 2006, p. 200). However, professional organizations in Canada request Canadian experience, and some organizations do not have a process of evaluating and recognizing immigrants’ credentials. For that reason, immigrants have experienced downward occupational mobility (Guo), resulting in the need to attain Canadian credentials such as a college diploma in Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician. This section further describes ESL learners’ motives for enrolling in postsecondary programs and explains how communication skills can affect ESL learners’ cultural integration, professional development, and socialization.

Cultural Integration and Professional Development

Cultural integration and professional development in a new home country are strong motivators for an immigrant’s acquisition of a new language. Cultural integration and professional development go hand in hand. According to a study of immigrant Canadian learners seeking careers as long-term resident care aides or home support workers, the main motivators for pursuing these careers were “to have the opportunity to learn English, to get a good job, and to have more contact with English-speaking Canadians” (Duff, Wong, & Early, 2002, p. 406). Therefore, language proficiency is tied in with the idea of socialization. Pritchard and Maki (2006) investigated attitudes toward the learning of English among a group of Japanese university students and found that the “responsibility of foreign-language learning includes more than instruction in the

language itself; there is also a clear insistence that students need to attain communicative competence” (p. 142). According to Canale and Swain (1980) communicative competence includes not only grammatical skills but also sociolinguistic and strategic competence. It is connected to the idea that language competence can be motivated by “professional advancement” (Pritchard & Maki, p. 145) or learning English in order to advance in one’s profession. Language instruction specific to fields of study or disciplines would inspire learners to immerse themselves in the language, thus making for more effective language learning.

Goal setting is related to language immersion which eventually leads to cultural integration. Li’s (2006) study of Chinese graduate students in the UK describes the notions of self-confidence and goal setting theory in relation to motivation in second language learning. The author distinguishes between extrinsic and intrinsic motivation for second language learning. Such theories point to the “linguistic challenges they (second language learners) face and the process of their adaptation to both their degree study and the new society and culture” (Li, p. 38). Using semistructured interviews at the beginning and end of an academic year, Li found that the learners’ incentive to learn English pointed to extrinsic motivators such as adaptation and functioning in everyday life in the UK, including their work towards their degree research and future career perspectives. According to the participants, English language proficiency will also reflect the quality of their research, which in turn ties in with career prospects and recognition.

Socialization

Socialization, an effect of second-language acquisition, has benefits not only for immigrants but also for the society in which these individuals live. Basu (2006) examined the issues surrounding social and political integration and entitlement to membership in a society. Using the Toronto District School Board (TDSB) as a backdrop for the study, Basu looked at multiethnic neighbourhoods as sites of social capital formation. Social capital can be defined as “the information, trust and norms of reciprocity inhering in one’s social networks” (p. 63). According to Basu, social capital is closely associated with the ideas of “belonging, integration, assimilation and the practice of citizenship” (p. 73). The author states that if social capital is linked to the concept of integration, then “the role of public institutions in fostering such environments needs to be closely examined” (p. 63). Basu’s study focused on the function of public schools in the integration of immigrants through an examination of civic engagement and social interactions of immigrant parents in various TDSB schools. The results indicated that schools that provide a variety of resources for new immigrants, such as ESL programs, were at a higher risk of closing when there was provincial mismanagement of federal guidelines, resulting in “further polarization of vulnerable populations” (p. 73).

The lack of ESL resources in public schools can be translated into the community college context. If quality ESL and relevant professional development programs are not accessible to immigrant college learners, then Ontario immigrants will be unable to access their social capital and in turn offer it to the community. The results of my study thus have the potential of contributing by recommending improved practices within college programs to accommodate immigrant learners.

The Relationship Between ESL Learners and the Organizational Context

As established in Chapter One, ESL learners are accepted into mainstream college programs as full-time students because of the increased funding allocated to the college for full-time students. A college receives 100% funding for learners enrolled in full-time programs as opposed to 60% funding for part-time learners (CIITE, 2004). Yet, when ESL learners are accepted, they have difficulty succeeding in the programs. With declining fiscal support from government, colleges are looking to student enrolment as a means of sustaining their programs (Bos, 2001; Laanan, Hardy, & Katsinas, 2006). Although traditionally the role of community colleges has been to service their communities by providing accessible and relevant programs to their citizens, what is missing from the colleges' approach is what Weisman and Longacre (2000) describe as an "affective construct of community ... [that] identifies the community as everyone: all ages and social groups" (p. 366). The community college fulfills the idea of servicing a community, but according to what standard? Is acceptance into a college program enough for ESL learners to succeed within their community?

The following section deals with ESL learners' links with postsecondary organizations. The section highlights issues associated with language testing, ESL curriculum, and the challenges ESL learners face when in mainstream postsecondary courses.

Postsecondary Assessment of Language Proficiency

The Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) is a common assessment tool used by colleges and universities to determine whether or not a learner has the English language proficiency necessary for academic studies. A recent addition to the

TOEFL test is the Test of Written English (TWE) which examines a learner's academic writing proficiency. A quantitative study by Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari (1999) of the University of Bahrain looked at the TOEFL test as a predictor of student academic success. They found a high correlation between students' TOEFL scores and their grade point average (GPA), overall promoting the TOEFL as an "effective test instrument in an English as a Second Language learning context where English is used as a medium of instruction" (p. 397). The researchers suggest that the TOEFL is an effective predictor of the students' language ability in second-language learning circumstances where the learners will normally be better prepared to integrate into the North American environment. Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari's study raises interesting questions. What is meant by the authors' notion of integration? Is there a correlation between student language test scores, student learning experience, and student success?

In contrast to Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari's position, Elson (1992) and Shohamy (2000) believe that testing for language proficiency does not reflect the true linguistic competency of the learner. The TOEFL assesses the students' use of grammatical structures and knowledge of vocabulary, but it does not address whether or not the learner can function well within a classroom situation and "use the language effectively in classroom discourse" (Elson, p. 116). Moreover, Elson argues that the more isolated the content on the assessment tool, the less relevant it is as a language assessment tool. The author discusses language testing from a critical perspective, claiming that it is "an unfair barrier to the integration of ESL students into the academic mainstream, and has the effect of relieving the institutions of their responsibility to provide the language development framework that is the right of such students" (p. 111).

Further, language testing (LT) “is relevant in theory, but not in practice as it does not address major issues of language learning and the complexity of language” (Shohamy, 2000, p. 551) in second-language acquisition (SLA). Shohamy recommends “constructing theories of LT that are based on current views of SLA theories - assessing more components of language, such as interlanguage, variation, language processing, pragmatics, and aspects that address the context, complexity and dynamics of language” (p. 552).

The bigger question which this section thus addresses is: What is LT trying to accomplish? Is it meant to assist learners with academic success? As the TOEFL stands at present, it is merely a band-aid approach to determining access to higher education. And without careful consideration of second-language learning theories, LT is merely a quick and easy solution to determine if ESL learners are linguistically competent enough to succeed in college programs.

The increase of ESL applicants to postsecondary institutions has created a push towards language testing as a means of acceptance into programs. This in turn has led to the use of simplistic tools such as the TOEFL and the TWE. What happens to the learners who do not meet the criteria of the language test? As a rule, they are encouraged to take more courses, spend more time and money to develop their language skills, which may not have been assessed accurately in the first place. Elson (1992) recommends the coming together of ESL professionals, language test developers, administrators, and governments to address the legitimate needs of ESL learners rather than relying solely on TOEFL scores. Following Elson’s suggestion, in this study, I aim to bring together some

of these professionals to examine the communication needs of ESL learners in one southern Ontario community college.

ESL Curriculum

Ontario colleges offer English language courses to ESL learners through either the Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada (LINC) program or English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. The following section discusses studies which look at ESL curriculum in relation to the idea of human capital while also addressing student perceptions on types of ESL curriculum which might enhance their academic and professional interests.

Immigrants' human capital and ESL curriculum. The completion of a community college diploma enhances a learner's human capital, leading to economic benefits (Laanan et al., 2006). As stated earlier in this chapter, immigrants coming to Canada are accepted based on their professional skills, but many are unable to use their skills to realize economic benefits.

With 16% of immigrants to Ontario coming from China (ACAATO, 2006a), Zhu's (2005) qualitative study of Chinese immigrant professionals is very relevant. Human capital, explains the author, is "embodied in a person, in terms of greater skills, knowledge" (Zhu, p. 54) and having a productive potential. The notion of human capital was first developed by Shultz in the 1960s and symbolizes the production of wealth (Bouchard, 2006). Is knowledge a source of wealth for immigrant professionals in Canada? Zhu reports that the human capital of immigrant professionals is not being recognized in Canada. Her ethnographic study revealed that despite their high TOEFL scores, most immigrant professionals are not fluent in English. Moreover, traditional

adult ESL instruction in programs such as LINC and those in postsecondary institutions do not help the immigrant professionals to use their human capital. LINC instruction focuses on basic language needs, but immigrant professionals “need programs that provide training and information” (p. 250) for the purpose of using “their professional expertise” (p. 250).

Zhu (2005) found that Chinese English language learners were frustrated with the level and appropriateness of the LINC curriculum. Furthermore, despite the development of Canadian Language Benchmarks (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000), LINC instructors are not required to follow this curriculum. All instructors have “absolute autonomy about their agendas” (Zhu, p. 253). Zhu’s study highlights the problems with ESL instruction offered to immigrants in Canada, which in turn reflect the communication needs of immigrant college learners. It raises the question: What type of curriculum is best suited to assist college ESL learners in their professional goals?

ESL student and instructor perceptions of ESL curriculum. Within an ESL classroom, the instructor must be aware of cultural differences in teaching practices. There could be a disconnection between the instructor’s teaching perspective (Pratt, 1998) and the preferred learning style of the ESL student (Dornyei, 2005). A study by Song (2006) of Kingsborough Community College in New York surveyed the instructors and interviewed students in order “to identify possible patterns of and factors contributing to failure in an advanced ESL course” (p. 419). Song found a contributing factor to be the ESL learners’ misunderstanding of teaching strategies used in the classroom: The lack of rote learning and the emphasis on reading and writing in English in academic contexts puzzled the learners. This puzzlement led to misunderstandings on how to approach

learning activities. The ESL learners' puzzlement highlights how learning theories, concepts, and methodologies that are referred to as good practices in Western culture may not be relevant or effective in other cultures (Brigham & Gouthro, 2006).

The question then becomes: How do postsecondary institutions accommodate ESL learners' communication needs while still advancing their content knowledge? My inquiry explores college administrator, faculty member, and ESL student perceptions of language ability, effective curriculum, and teaching strategies to assist ESL learners.

Moving on to College Courses: Instructor and ESL Student Perspectives

ESL learners who have successfully completed LINC and EAP (English for Academic Purposes) courses can be accepted into mainstream college programs. However, the completion of these language courses does not guarantee that the learners' communication skills, such as listening and speaking, are at a sufficient level to ensure their success in the college programs. Tatar's (2005) recent study of Turkish international students in a graduate program in the United States found that "international graduate students are not perceived as language learners in their academic courses; they are treated as members of the academic community and expected to participate on an equal basis with native-English speaking students" (p. 339). However, "difficulties with using and understanding the English language and a lack of proficiency in English have been the two greatest factors that affect the adaptation of international students to U.S. academic culture" (p. 339). Tatar also points out a stigma associated with the label "international student": international students are usually "characterized by insufficient language skills" (p. 347), despite the fact that they are expected to participate as native-

English speaking students. This stigma encouraged Turkish international students to not take risks in the classroom because they feared making mistakes and losing prestige.

Language skills are closely linked to confidence (Sauve, 2000). ESL learners' fear of participating is associated with the affective domain of learning (Bloom, 1956; Pritchard & Maki, 2006). Tatar (2005) recommends that ESL learners should be less concerned with making mistakes while speaking and should create ways for practicing language use. This is easier said than done, however. A study by Sanner, Wilson, and Samson (2002) examined the perceptions of ESL learners in a nursing program in the U.S.A. . Their study also found that international students felt threatened in the classroom because of their English proficiency levels, highlighting the lack of patience and understanding of other learners in the classroom. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Cycle is based on the belief in the merits of active learning and is a model adapted by Ontario colleges. ESL college learners are expected to actively participate in the classroom. It is clear that if ESL learners are fearful to engage in learning because of their communication skills, the instructors' perception is that the learners are not immersed in learning. There is a vicious cycle happening here because the less ESL learners are engaged, the less their communication skills will improve.

Content-based ESL and EAP courses. Effective second-language acquisition is linked to relevant and meaningful content (Rogers, 1969; Mohan & Beckett, 2001). For example, Song's (2006) student participants revealed lack of interest in the subject as a contributing factor to their failure in the ESL course. However, the college site for Song's study offers a content-specific ESL program. The students' opinion of the program was "content courses linked with ESL were acknowledged and greatly

appreciated” (Song, p. 427). Students favoured this program because it focused on content related to their area of study.

ESL courses with an emphasis on discipline-specific content are contested in some postsecondary institutions. Melles, Millar, Morton, and Fegan (2005) describe the tension between those who view ESL as strictly language instruction and those who believe ESL instruction can enhance discipline-specific learning in higher education. The authors state that “the positioning of English as a Second Language (ESL) on the periphery of the university curriculum is a conventional response to the need to separate the language of instruction- English- from disciplinary content” (p. 283). Furthermore, they believe that ESL instruction views ESL learners as “patients who are deficient in “basic skills” and must be cured” (Benesch, 1988, cited in Melles et al., p. 284). Their study revolves around a case analysis of a pilot course in the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Melbourne. This course was established as a subject within the program rather than as an ESL subject within the Faculty of Arts, a structure which parallels the current ESL program at the southern Ontario college which is the site of my study. The pilot course eliminated, through its title and content, the notion of support, remediation, and language training normally associated with ESL courses. Instead, it focused on the academic and content-specific language requirements of the university’s international students. Overall, the study found that close collaboration between faculty and ESL staff was the key to the success of this project: Collaboration on teaching strategies, critical pedagogy to reflect a variety of world views, and updating content to reflect changes in the profession were some of the recommendations emanating from the study. My inquiry also builds on the notion of bringing together the ideas of key

stakeholders to address the communication needs of college ESL learners in Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

Moreover, content-specific ESL courses enhance not only language acquisition but also academic skills. A quantitative study conducted by Kasper (1997) in the U.S. examined the correlation between content-based ESL instruction and academic success. ESL students at Kingsborough Community College received a similar four-stage instructional treatment of reading. The study found that the experimental group students who received ESL instruction based on a specific academic subject outperformed the control group students who did not receive content-based ESL instruction.

When students are continually faced with academically-oriented linguistic and rhetorical tasks, they must learn to use English language not only linguistically, but interpretively and critically as well....These tasks not only foster sophisticated use of the English language, but they also teach students the skills they will need to be successful in college. (p. 317)

Content-specific EAP courses are also successful in that learning can be transferred from a content-based EAP course to other university courses. James's (2006) research, which focused on the perspectives of ESL students, instructors, and administrators concerning the transfer of learning from EAP courses, found that there is a transfer of learning, particularly in the area of communication skills such as listening, speaking, and writing. Examples of transferred learning were the application of content-specific knowledge, study skills, and discussions with other learners. The findings demonstrate that the content-based EAP provided the learners with the confidence to engage successfully in other university courses. James's study then shows that effective

and relevant ESL instruction is vital to providing college ESL learners with the communication skills needed to succeed in their program of study. My study examines the effectiveness of the college's current ESL and EAP curriculum in relation to the ESL learners' experiences in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

Unfortunately, as indicated by Song (2006), some students do not "take advantage of these helpful programs, as they were oftentimes not informed of the programs' existence" (p. 427). Perceived support on motivation to learn English is "largely institutionally based and provided in the form of in-sessional English courses and the efforts made by the academic departments or the university to encourage their students to enroll" (Li, 2006, p. 51), pointing to an institution's role in promoting an effective English language program. My study aims to provide insights into who is responsible and accountable for assisting college ESL learners.

The Relationship Between ESL Learners and the Content

Studies on second-language learning theories show how the context and dynamics of a college classroom can enhance and hinder immigrant learners' English language acquisition and use.

Age is a factor affecting second-language learning. Patkowski (1980, cited in Lightbrown & Spada, 1999) studied the spoken English of 67 highly educated immigrants in the United States. He found that the participants who began learning English before the age of 15 scored higher in terms of syntax (word order, overall sentence structure) than those who began learning English after age 15. In second-language acquisition theory, the idea of a time frame for optimal acquisition is known as the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), first introduced by Lenneberg in 1967 (Ioup,

2005). Since that time, the CPH has been renamed the Sensitive Period (Lee & Schachter, 1997). There has been much debate on whether or not age plays a role in second-language acquisition. From my experience teaching college ESL learners, I have observed that the students who were immersed in English at a younger age were more proficient orally than those who learned English at an older age.

According to Lightbrown and Spada (1999), “the opportunities for learning [and] the motivation to learn are also important determining factors in both rate of learning and eventual success in learning” (p. 68). In the context of postsecondary education, a college learner can be defined as someone with lived experiences and for whom faculty members hold a high level of academic expectation (Kasworm, 2005). For ESL college learners in discipline-specific programs, that expectation is problematic in that their language abilities get in the way of their academic success. Their motivation to learn English for professional development may be a positive influence on their learning, but the opportunities for acquiring English may not assist them in attaining their professional goals.

Krashen’s Monitor Model (1981, 1983, 1985, cited in Mitchell & Myles, 1998) is built on the idea that second-language acquisition (SLA) is affected by opportunities for learning. Krashen’s hypotheses differentiate between learning a second language (L2) and acquiring an L2, with language acquisition as the ultimate level. Krashen believes that L2 acquisition is the result of opportunities for meaningful and natural interaction. It is characterized by steps or phases which depend on the idea that learning an L2 is maximized when the L2 is not simply learned through memorization (Mitchell & Myles).

Hence, the quality of the opportunities for SLA affect the level at which a second language is acquired.

Kasper (2000) takes a specific look at theoretical frameworks and pedagogical applications in relation to college ESL content-based instruction. She reviews one of Krashen's hypotheses, the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis (1985). Comprehensible input can be defined as second-language input or messages the learners can understand, but are "just beyond the learner's current L2 competence ... If a learner's current competence is i , then comprehensible input is $i + one$, the next step in the developmental sequence" (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 38). Long's Interaction Hypothesis (1996, cited in Mitchell & Myles, 1998) suggests that interaction between native speakers and L2 learners enhances language learning. Swain's discussion of the Output Hypothesis (2005) claims that language use is not simply the product of language acquisition, but also the process of producing language. These hypotheses are similar to the idea of second-language immersion, suggesting that a second language is acquired much like a first language when "it is used as a medium for learning other things" (Kasper, p. 4). Krashen's, Long's and Swain's hypotheses offer ESL learners "contextualized language curricula built around meaningful, comprehensible input through which not only language, but also information, is acquired" (Kasper, p. 4). The author argues that "language acquisition is further facilitated and motivation increased if the information acquired is highly relevant to students' personal and educational goals" (p. 4).

It would appear that discipline-specific ESL courses can provide this type of comprehensible input. However, according to Mitchell and Myles (1998), the major criticism of Krashen's theory is that it is too vague: How is i and thus $i + one$

determined? The theory suggests a cyclical process that is difficult to monitor.

Furthermore, they suggest that second-language acquisition is highly dependent on the learner's affective readiness to take in the second language.

The affective inclination to learn a L2 is related to the sociolinguistic perspective of second-language communicative competence. The issue of gatekeeping and power relations in second-language communication, speakers' identity and self-esteem, and the affective and emotional element in L2 use are all facets of the sociolinguistic perspective of second-language learning (Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Schecter & Cummins, 2003). Sociolinguistics or "the study of language in use" (Mitchell & Myles, p. 163) in relation to second-language acquisition is a new trend in theorizing how second languages are learned. A study by Bremer, Broeder, Roberts, Simonot, and Vasseur (1993, cited in Mitchell & Myles) of immigrant workers in Europe found that when in situations such as job interviews or counseling, where there is a clear mismatch of power, the native speaker is the more powerful gatekeeper and the L2 speaker is the less powerful participant in the encounter. Similarly, a study conducted by Losey (1995, cited in Mitchell & Myles) examined a North American adult literacy classroom and found that the Anglo-American students dominated the class discussions. Both these studies "illustrate how unequal power relations can control both learners' overall opportunities and willingness to take part in L2 interaction" (Mitchell & Myles, p. 167).

What the above studies and perceptions in second-language learning theories relate to is the idea that language is not learned in isolation, separated from the context within which it will be used. This context is influenced by sociological and political perspectives of the learners and the community within which the L2 will be used. The

aim of my study is thus to help paint a clearer picture of the perspectives of stakeholders involved in the issue of communication needs of ESL learners in college programs, specifically regarding what is meant by successful language use and how adult ESL learners learn best.

The Relationship Between ESL Learners and the Teacher

The role of the educator is crucial in helping learners succeed academically (Buttaro, 2004). Although Schecter and Cummins' (2003) work comes from the perspective of teaching children English as a Second Language, their idea that the development of academic expertise is dependent on teacher-student interactions can be applied to teaching college ESL learners. They state that "there is a reciprocal relationship between cognitive engagement and identity investment. The more students learn, the more their academic self-concept grows, and the more academically engaged they become" (p. 10). The reciprocal relationship between teachers and students is explored in Buttaro's study which investigated a group of Hispanic students learning English. Buttaro emphasized that at moments of difficulty with academic skills, "when teachers are supportive and nurturing, the threshold of student motivation may be sufficiently raised to endure the task at hand" (p. 36-37). A positive, nonthreatening (Rogers, 1969) learning environment, enhanced by a respectful teacher-student relationship, encourages second-language development.

Unfortunately, the teacher-student interaction can also exhibit power differences between the educator and the learner. Power differences in second-language learning are another focus of Song's (2006) study. The author states that "when faced with new concepts of evaluation and different instructional methods in a foreign country - and

without adequate knowledge of the language - they [the learners] needed and cried out for external help” (p. 428). However, the learners stated that their needs were not attended to. Issues noted by the students were inability to understand professors’ comments on written work and lack of instructor availability for one-on-one meetings. It appears that the learners viewed the instructors as having power over their learning because of the instructors’ higher level of language use. The learners themselves were not successful in finding support for their language learning needs. One question which comes out of Song’s study is what accommodations can be made to minimize differences in power?

The Relationship Between Teachers and Content

The level of success of immigrant ESL learners is often blamed on the learner’s linguistic deficit (Meskill, 2005). Responsibility for the immigrant’s failure to succeed in learning is placed on the individual learner and not on the education system. What is lacking in the system is teacher training to include the needs of ESL learners. Meskill believes that “core curricula for educators in training too often fall short of the depth and detail needed to successfully serve English language learner populations” (p. 739). The results of the Training All Teachers program, a U.S. federally funded project to educate elementary school teachers about issues specific to English language learners, seem to indicate that informed school professionals enhance the learning opportunities for ESL students. In the Canadian context, teacher training involves “a teaching practicum that has as its vision to create an integrated formative experience, with interrelated and overlapping academic, site placement, and inquiry learning components” (Schecter, Solomon, & Kittmer, 2003, p. 81). This kind of teacher education recognizes the prospective teachers’ need to understand the social and cultural backgrounds that affect

the teaching and learning process for individuals. A teacher training model which reflects the characteristics and needs of the learners could be applied to the Canadian college context. Pratt (1998) suggests that adult educators should reflect on who their learners are and what these learners may bring to the learning environment which may influence their learning or the educator's teaching. By shifting the focus from the relationship between the ESL learner and the content to the relationship between the teacher and the content in relation to ESL learner needs, the community college context could better meet the needs of college ESL learners and could thus provide a more inclusive learning environment. The possibility of college teacher training described above is a point of investigation in my study.

Methodological Implications of the Literature Review

What is missing from the studies discussed in this chapter is a comprehensive inquiry combining the above categories. To date, there is no Canadian study which examines ESL learners' connection with the college, second-language learning theories and effective curriculum to meet the communication needs of college ESL learners, the ESL student-teacher relationship, and teacher training. Hence, the need for this study is clear. My study examines the phenomenon of ESL learner communication needs as experienced by multiple stakeholders and provides insights into the relationship between (a) ESL learners and society, (b) ESL learners and the college, (c) ESL learners and the content, (d) ESL learners and the teacher, and (e) teachers with the content. I took a qualitative approach; I included the voice and perspectives of those directly involved with one southern Ontario college's ESL learners in Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. ESL learners graduating from these programs need to demonstrate

effective communication skills. Informed by multiple perspectives, my aim was to determine how ESL learners' experience the programs and make recommendations about how their communication skills can be enhanced.

Chapter Summary

This chapter outlined concerns associated with adult ESL learners such as linguistic, organizational, and affective issues. The chapter was framed using an adaptation of Pratt's (1998) General Model of Teaching, which highlights relationships between elements in a teaching environment. The relationships discussed in this chapter were the relationships between ESL learners and society, ESL learners and the organizational context, ESL learners and the content, ESL learners and the teacher, and the teacher and the content.

The studies discussed in this chapter have highlighted the linguistic, organizational, and affective issues concerning ESL learners. When looking at the relationship between ESL learners and society, studies uncovered affective issues such as cultural integration, professional development, and socialization. For the relationship between ESL learners and the organizational context, studies emphasized linguistic issues such as language testing and organizational issues such as ESL curriculum and college course content. For the relationship between ESL learners and the content, studies highlighted linguistic issues such as second-language learning theories and affective issues surrounding the power dynamics between ESL speakers and native-English speakers. For the relationship between ESL learners and the teacher, studies presented affective issues such as the role of the teacher in the student-teacher relationship and

power differences. For the relationship between teachers and the content, the studies pointed to organizational issues such as teacher training in ESL learner needs.

The studies reviewed in this chapter point to the “what” is happening, but there are few answers as to the “why” or to the “what next.” In this study, I provide insights and understandings from multiple stakeholders’ perspectives. My objective is to help accommodate the communication needs of college ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

As stated in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to understand and determine the communication needs of ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs in a southern Ontario community college. By describing, interpreting, and understanding the perspectives of administrators, faculty members, and ESL students involved in the two college programs, the study could lead to further understanding of college program practices in terms of ESL learner needs. Chapter Three will outline the research methodology and design, site and participant selection, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Feasibility, establishing credibility, assumptions and methodological limitations, ethical considerations and the dissemination of findings will also be addressed.

Research Methodology and Design

Although there is much debate in the qualitative research arena about the role and influence of a study's theoretical framework on its methodology, this research design acknowledges that a study's theoretical framework informs its methodology (Anfara & Mertz, 2006). The inquiry used a generic qualitative, descriptive, multimethod approach (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Trochim, 2001). This approach was best suited for the research topic in that the purpose of the study was not to explain but to understand and gain insight into college ESL learner communication needs so as to include the voices of those most affected (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2003; Stringer, 2004) and to improve the quality of college programs (Chen, 2005) for ESL learners. This approach produced the most informative data but was not meant for generalizing to a greater population. It did, however, provide rich narrative descriptions of a subjective reality (McMillan & Wergin,

2006), and in this study, the subjective realities came from members of three key stakeholder groups, namely, administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners in one southern Ontario college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

The starting point for a study's theoretical framework is the researcher's epistemological beliefs. According to Scott (1998), a philosophical framework is "an orientation towards life that guides us in our judgments" (p. 98). The constructivist paradigm influenced my choice of a generic qualitative research methodology as I believe that knowledge is not separate from human experience. Constructivism, like the developmental teaching perspective (Pratt, 1998), maintains that "human beings construct their perceptions of the world, that no one perception is 'right' or more 'real' than another, and that these realities must be seen as wholes rather than divided into discrete variables that are analyzed separately" (Glesne, 2006, p.7). The use of individual interviews and a focus group session to collect descriptive opinions of administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners involved in the central phenomenon helped to construct a big picture perspective of the communication needs of ESL college learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

Another epistemological belief I hold is that knowledge is "not neutrally derived. Rather, our perceptions of the world are shaped by social relations of power" (Plumb & Welton, 2001, p. 74). In using a generic qualitative methodology which places an emphasis on participant experience, my aim was to gather rich, descriptive data on stakeholder perspectives. These accounts allowed me to examine the key stakeholders' viewpoints through the critical paradigm in order to identify power dynamics involved in

seeking to improve practices and policies that might be most effective in assisting college ESL learners in the two selected programs.

Site and Participant Selection

The site for the study was one southern Ontario community college. I chose this college not only because of my connection with the institution but also because of its diverse learner demographics. Specifically, as established in Chapter One, I chose the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs because of the high number of ESL learners in these programs.

All participants were associated with the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. I conducted seven one hour individual interviews with 4 administrators and 3 faculty members. I conducted two separate one hour interviews with 2 ESL students and one focus group session with 2 ESL students (a total of 4 ESL students). I thus collected data from 11 participants, all of whom were female. The participants' gender is a reflection of the composition of the programs. Most learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician program are female.

The constructivist paradigm views knowledge as subjective, and when taking a critical perspective, it is important to incorporate as many voices as possible. Therefore, I feel it was imperative to include the key stakeholders involved in the context. As a result, I invited participants from administration, faculty members, and ESL student positions. In this case, the administrators provided information on policies associated with college curriculum planning (Tierney & Dilley, 2002). Faculty members, on the other hand, offered insights on the social context of learning within their programs (Tierney & Dilley) as well as ideas about effective teaching strategies for ESL learners.

However, Stringer (2004) states that “faulty or incorrect understandings arise when teachers mistake their own experiences and perspectives for their students’ experiences and perspectives” (p. 26). Therefore, I included the ESL learners in the two programs so as to present their perceptions of their communication challenges. Overall, then, the inquiry brought together the insights of three key stakeholder groups so as to shed light on the communication needs of college ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

Administrators

I conducted one hour individual interviews with 2 associate deans of the programs (past and current) and the program co-ordinators (one program coordinator from each program). The associate deans and program co-ordinators were chosen based on their role in administration (Tierney & Dilley, 2002) but also because they are involved in decisions at the curriculum level. The program co-ordinators are faculty members, so their interviews represented views from both the administrative and faculty member perspectives. Overall, these administrator interviews provided insight into the relationship between the ESL learners and the organization in terms of acceptance policies, graduate success, and other aspects.

Faculty Members

I conducted individual interviews with one faculty member from each of the programs. Convenience sampling (Creswell, 2005; Trochim, 2001; Warren, 2002) was used to choose these faculty member participants. The faculty members are my colleagues, but we do not teach in the same department.

In addition to the interviews with Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician faculty members, I interviewed one faculty member from the college's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses. As mentioned in Chapter One, ESL college learners take an EAP course prior to being accepted into full-time college programs. The purpose of including this faculty member was to understand at what level the ESL students' communication skills need to be prior to acceptance into the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

Recruitment Procedures for Administrator and Faculty Member Participants

I contacted the administrator and faculty member participants by telephone or in person, using a script approved by the university's Research Ethics Board (REB). During this conversation, I outlined the study's rationale, purpose, methodology, and confidentiality procedures in order to present potential participants with a clear understanding of the inquiry. I asked them if they would like to participate in the study. When they agreed, I then asked to set up a time and place for the interview that was convenient for them. I conducted all of these interviews in their private offices. I conducted a telephone interview with one of the associate deans. I followed up by e-mailing to the participants an Informed Consent form for their records. Another copy of the consent form was signed at the interview, prior to the start of the interview. One associate dean faxed to my home office a signed consent form.

Students

I conducted two one hour individual interviews with 2 ESL students in the Pharmacy Technician program. I conducted one one hour focus group session with two ESL learners from the Practical Nursing program. I organized these interviews and the

focus group session in a small conference room on the college campus where the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs are offered. The student participants' mother tongues varied from Polish, Tamil, and Chinese.

Recruitment Procedures for Student Participants

To recruit student participants, I contacted, by telephone or in person, faculty members teaching in the programs for permission to visit one of their classes, using a script approved by the REB. I visited three classes from the Practical Nursing Program and five classes from the Pharmacy Technician program to invite ESL learners to participate in the student focus group sessions, using a preapproved script. I distributed to all students in the classes an Informed Consent form outlining the study's purpose, rationale, and the steps to be taken for protecting confidentiality. This copy of the consent form remained with the students for their own reference. I then distributed a second copy of the consent form. I informed the students that I was recruiting ESL learners. I asked that those who were interested in participating review, fill out, sign the consent form, and place it in an envelope provided for the class. I asked that the students return all of the second copies of the consent form, signed and unsigned, in the same envelope provided. This procedure was done while I was waiting outside the classroom. The envelope provided confidentiality in terms of who was interested in participating. With the help of faculty members, I visited other classrooms and repeated the above process.

The consent form contained a short survey that allowed me to choose the student participants based on purposeful sampling (Creswell, 2005; Trochim, 2001) where participants are selected based on predetermined criteria (Vaughn, Schumm, & Sinagub, 1996) reflecting the focus of the study. The selection criteria were: ESL immigrant

learners (who have immigrated to Canada within the last 5 years) with at least one term completed in their program. I asked the students to provide this information through the survey questions in the consent form. I explained to the students that I would contact those who qualified by telephone, using a “Notification to Participate” form approved by the REB.

I invited the students to participate in the focus group sessions at a predetermined time and place. I notified the students orally and in the consent form that a \$30 gift certificate for the college bookstore would be raffled at the end of each of the focus group sessions. This was an incentive for the student participants to attend the focus group sessions and satisfied my values as both a researcher and educator: I felt that I could thus provide an incentive to participate in my study that would assist the students in furthering their education through the purchase of course textbooks or supplies.

I repeated this procedure in each class in an attempt to recruit 6-8 participants for each focus group session. However, recruiting student focus group participants was a challenge. After visiting several classes from each program, I was able to recruit only 7 ESL learners from the Practical Nursing program and 8 ESL learners from the Pharmacy Technician program. Of these potential participants, only 2 students from the Practical Nursing and 2 from the Pharmacy Technician program participated. Even then, I had to organize several dates and times to accommodate learners’ schedules and commitments. These difficulties in recruiting participants explain why some of the intended focus group sessions turned into individual interviews, as only 1 participant came. Although focus group sessions can provide rich data, the recruitment process is time-consuming from a researcher’s perspective. I began to reevaluate the recruitment process and incentives

and wondered if an alternate incentive would have been more appealing, for example if the incentive had been monetary or based on the participants' interests rather than my own.

Data Collection Methods

The main sources of data for this study are the individual interviews and the focus group session. I audio-taped the individual interviews and the focus group session. I hired a transcriber to transcribe the interviews and focus group session.

Individual Interviews

I chose the method of an individual, semistructured (Fontana & Frey, 2000) interview because it ensures consistency among the interviews and at the same time allows for flexibility according to the participant answers. During both the administrator and faculty member interviews, I used an interview guide (see Appendix A: Interview Guides–Administrator, Faculty, and EAP Faculty) that allowed for flow yet structure to the content discussed (Creswell, 2005). I began these interviews with a general opening question to establish rapport, followed by an introductory question related to their experiences with ESL learners at the college, leading to key questions relating to language assessment procedures, program curriculum, ESL learner academic success rates in the programs, and ideas on accommodating ESL learners in the programs. I ended the interviews with a concluding question which allowed the participant to make additional or closing comments.

The administrator interviews included questions on organizational issues, while the faculty member interviews dealt with teaching strategies and student learning styles.

The interview with the faculty member teaching English for Academic Purposes focused on the college's preparatory program.

Student Interviews and Focus Group Session

As well as conducting the interviews with administrators, faculty members, and students, I facilitated the student focus group session. For the student interviews and the focus group questions, I followed an interview guide (see Appendix B: Focus Group Guide). I began with an opening question relating to why they chose their program of study. I then continued with key questions relating to their perceptions of their program, their perceptions of managing in the program, and their ideas of how the college might do more to accommodate their communication needs. I ended the focus group session by inviting the participants to add to or summarize their ideas. I conducted the student interviews and focus group session in such a way so as to make the students comfortable. I created a welcoming environment by providing coffee and snacks. I asked clarifying questions and summarized their ideas to verify what they had said.

Verifying My Observations

I took field notes during the individual interviews, and an observer took notes during the focus group session so as to complement the audiotape recordings (Fern, 2001). The field notes were organized using a systematic approach where comments from respondents are documented, the order in which the comments are made is noted (Fern; Mills, 2003), and my reflections at the time of the interview are included (Frey & Fontana, 1993; Knodel, 1993). The observer took notes using the same approach described above.

Data Analysis Techniques

After reviewing the tape recordings, transcripts, and field notes of the individual interviews and focus group session, I analyzed the comments using a thematic approach, keeping in mind that the more salient points come up first during the interviews (Fern, 2001). The analysis then placed themes as they occurred during the interviews while establishing “common patterns or themes between particular types of respondents” (Warren, 2002, p. 85).

Charmaz (2006) states that “through coding, you *define* what is happening in the data and begin to grapple with what it means” (p. 46). I used a coding approach in two stages: initial coding and focused coding (Charmaz). During the initial coding, I focused on line-by-line coding. I did this to ensure that my assumptions and interpretations of the phenomenon did not seep into the analysis stage. In other words, this technique allowed my analysis to stay close to the data produced by my participants and to not make any rushed interpretations (Charmaz). Focused coding, on the other hand, allowed for broader categories to be formed based on the initial codes. I then grouped the broader categories into themes. This coding technique allowed for what Coffey and Atkinson (1996) describe as zooming in and zooming out of the data. The descriptive initial coding zoomed into the data, while the focused coding looked at the data from a big picture perspective. This coding strategy fits with the generic qualitative methodology because it focuses on the participants’ perceptions of ESL learner communication needs, not on my assumptions of these needs. My assumptions therefore were neutralized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), making for more valid and trustworthy qualitative research.

To further ensure that my assumptions did not affect my data analysis, I reviewed my coding process and determined that some comments did not fit into the initial main themes. During this review process, I realized that my initial main themes and subthemes did not present a positive outlook on the students' characteristics and experiences. Therefore, with my thesis advisor's assistance, I reevaluated these comments and determined that an additional theme and subtheme needed to be presented in order to depict all the data. I then recoded all the interview transcripts using these additional codes, and I reorganized the themes and subthemes. Furthermore, I looked for common themes and subthemes among the three stakeholder groups. Table 1 presents the final list of themes and subthemes as a result of the steps in the analysis.

Feasibility

In order to commence this study, I had to receive clearance not only from the Brock University Research Ethics Board but also from the college's ethics board. The college ethics clearance process took an additional 2 months.

The availability of participants determines data collection (Fern, 2001). I needed to consider the availability of administrators and faculty members as well as student schedules. During the time it took to receive ethics clearance from the college's ethics board, the then associate dean had moved on to another position. However, I was fortunate enough to be able to include both the past and the current associate deans' perspectives. I conducted the interviews with administrators and faculty members first. I then conducted the individual student interviews and focus group session.

Table 1

Themes and Subthemes

Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Subthemes
Opportunities for ESL Learners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional success • Future studies • Personal gratification
ESL Student Characteristics: Approaches to Learning and Social Roles
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strengths: great potential, dedicated, motivated, first language, strong cognitive abilities, rich in experiences and knowledge • Additional responsibilities • Weak oral, listening, vocabulary skills • Possible learning disabilities • Traditional (transmission) learning style • Struggles with cultural identity • Low self-esteem • Coping mechanisms
Communication Expectations Placed on ESL Students
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed, responsible • Collaborative • Demonstrate deep learning • Communicate effectively • Math skills
Barriers to Successful Program Completion and Job Placement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural barriers • Difficulty learning • Inability to find co-op placement • Self-perception • Lack of success in national certification exam • Difficulty maintaining employment
Personal and Professional Reputation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • College's reputation amongst postsecondary institutions • Professional reputation • Personal reputation
Proposed Solutions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase standards (of acceptance, internal program) • Pretesting • Mandatory support • Presemester with an emphasis on professional vocabulary/content • Communications course with ESL component • Content-specific ESL / communications courses • Build in communication skills in existing courses • Pre- / postlistening or reading activities • Audiovisual materials • Reduce class size • Accessibility to knowledge

Establishing Credibility

For a qualitative researcher, establishing credibility means that the findings of the inquiry are valid and worth paying attention to (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To establish credibility, I followed three procedures. First, to introduce triangulation into this qualitative study, I included three stakeholder groups. Second, I included several data collection methods to ensure validity and reliability, as recommended by Creswell (2005) and Trochim (2001). Individual interviews, a focus group session, and a researcher reflective journal provided a variety of sources of data. As a further strategy to ensure credibility in the data analysis process, I used Mills's Triangulation Matrix (2003). This matrix served as an organizer of information from data sources in relation to the study's research questions (see Table 2). This matrix charted the key findings from the data analysis, which allowed for clear connections to be made to the research questions.

Second, I collaborated with my thesis advisor in an inquiry audit (Mills, 2003) to review and provide insights into the research process and techniques. The process of writing a research proposal was the first stage of the audit. Our collaboration continued, with my advisor providing a second coding of 15% of the data and a review of the results and implications of the study. This collaboration allowed for a deeper reflection on my intentions in this study and the addition of a theme and subthemes.

Third, I coded my reflections, field notes, and observer notes in terms of theoretical notes pertaining to education theory, observational notes relating to what I observed, and methodological notes which refer to the interview or focus group session process (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2001). The coding of reflections and field notes allowed me to step back from the data and examine my positionality during the

Table 2

Triangulation Matrix

Research Questions	Data Source		
	1. Individual Interviews	2. Focus Group Session	3. Reflective Journal / Field Notes
	Question #	Question #	Question #
1. What are the communication needs of ESL learners in the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs?	<i>Admin.:</i> Intro., 1, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 <i>Faculty:</i> Intro., 1, 3, 5, 6, 8 <i>EAP Faculty:</i> Intro., 1, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8	Intro., 2	Kept in my personal researcher's journal and in my field note format.
2. Are there limitations in the ESL preparation program currently in place for college ESL learners? If so, what are these limitations?	<i>Admin.:</i> Intro., 2, 3, 4, 5 <i>Faculty:</i> Intro., 4 <i>EAP Faculty:</i> Intro., 2, 3, 4, 6, 8	1, 2	See above comment
3. What kinds of curriculum and instructional accommodations should these programs consider in order to accommodate the ESL learners?	<i>Admin.:</i> 8, 9, 10, 11, 12 <i>Faculty:</i> 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 <i>EAP Faculty:</i> 7, 8	1, 2, 3	See above comment
4. What kinds of organizational interventions are most effective in assisting college ESL learners in the college's PN / PT programs?	<i>Admin.:</i> Intro., 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11 <i>Faculty:</i> Intro., 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10 <i>EAP Faculty:</i> Intro., 3, 4, 6, 8, 9, 10	3	See above comment

interviews and focus group session. Stringer (2004) states that “where experimental research starts from the assumption that the researcher take a disinterested, objective view in order to acquire an unbiased, objective truth, [qualitative research] assumes an engaged and subjective interaction with people in the research setting” (p. 30). The majority of the notes were observational and theoretical, while only a few were methodological.

Researcher Positionality

This inquiry recognizes that researcher positionality may have affected the findings. Because of my faculty member position in the college, I see myself as an insider examining the communication needs of college ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. Ackler (2000) notes that “the insider researcher has to make greater efforts to create that distance” (p. 194). With the steps described in the data collection methods (focus group observer and coding of field notes) and in the data analysis coding methods discussed earlier in this chapter, I ensured that my dual subjectivities of researcher and faculty member allowed me to be both an insider and an outsider simultaneously and to shift back and forth between roles (Ackler). My analysis of reflections, field notes, and observer notes encouraged me to reflect on important qualitative researcher questions outlined by Glesne (2006): What do I notice? Why do I notice what I notice? How can I interpret what I notice? and How can I know that my interpretation is the “right” one? Qualitative research puts an emphasis on the researcher, yet by reflecting on the above questions, I made my position and interest in this research topic explicit. I noticed that my faculty member position made me more attuned to the students’ description of their experiences. I was more responsive to the

students because of my teaching experience and because of my own ethnic background. In other words, I can relate to their perspective because members of my family have gone through similar experiences.

Assumptions and Methodological Limitations

The limitations of this study were inherent in my lack of experience in qualitative research methods. My assumptions going into this study were that ESL learners need assistance, that the learners themselves know they need help, and that the college would want to assist learners. The data however revealed that these assumptions were not accurate.

Because of my direct involvement with this issue, my perspective as an ESL instructor may have biased the inquiry. Gilles and Alldred (2002) state that “the researcher is not merely author, but interpreter, editor and political editor / ambassador” (p. 43). Although this study incorporated key stakeholders’ perspectives on the issue, it was my responsibility to accurately depict and represent these perceptions in my recommendations.

Another limitation is my assumption that the data collection techniques rendered authentic responses. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, faculty members are known to me, and some of the student participants I approached were former students of mine. Trochim (2001) states that

in interview situations you might assume that the respondents are free to say anything they wish ... if the respondent is under covert pressure from supervisors to respond in a certain way- you may erroneously see relationships in the responses that aren’t real and/or miss ones that are.” (p. 261)

Because of organizational culture, the administrator and faculty member participants may have felt compelled to describe their perceptions in a way that is not consistent with what they actually believe. Similarly, a drawback in using focus groups is that group discussions “may silence some people whose ideas are quite different from the majority of those speaking” (Glesne, 2006, p. 104). However, the possibility of feeling silenced or being influenced by the group was greatly attenuated by the fact that the focus group was made up of only 2 students.

Furthermore, research on focus group methodology suggests that group dynamics and power issues within the group may affect the reliability of the data (Greenbaum, 2000; Krueger & Casey, 2000). As an interviewer and a focus group facilitator, I needed to be aware of any possible power issues that arose during the individual interviews and focus group session and tried to facilitate in an open and nonthreatening environment (Glesne, 2006). I had to be mindful of my own body and facial expressions, as they may have led or discouraged the participants. However, the use of audiotape recorders, field notes with specific information on the context of the individual interviews and group dynamics within the focus group session, as well as an observer during the focus group session, helped to highlight any of the above-mentioned effects on the data collection process.

Furthermore, I assumed that the ESL learners expressed themselves comfortably and accurately. The students’ language levels may have affected their understanding of the questions and discussion, which in turn may have affected my interpretation of what they were saying.

Ethical Considerations

Another issue was one of ethical implications (Stringer, 2004). I took care to meet the standards of Canada's Tri-Council Policy on research with human participants.

To reduce any risks to the participants, I put confidentiality and security procedures in place. The following three measures were outlined in the informed consent form to ensure participants that their open and honest insights will not in any way harm their status within the college. First, I asked that a confidentiality agreement be signed by the transcriber and the focus group observer. This was done prior to transcribing and observing. Second, I aimed for participant confidentiality by listening to and reviewing the transcripts and ridding them of any site and participant identifiers. I chose pseudonyms for participants. Third, I kept tape recordings and copies of transcripts in a locked area of my home office, and I will destroy them by erasing the tapes, shredding the transcripts, and deleting the electronic files 2 years after the data were collected. Although the above measures demonstrate that I as a researcher aimed for participant confidentiality, I could not guarantee confidentiality amongst the student focus group participants (Glesne, 2006). This possible risk was explained to the student participants in their consent form.

To further help reduce any risks to the participants and as a member check procedure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I e-mailed to the participants their interview transcripts after completing the interviews or focus group session. I asked the participants to review the transcripts to make certain that they were comfortable with how they expressed themselves and to provide them with the opportunity to change any of their

comments. One participant responded and further clarified some statements in her transcripts.

Dissemination of Findings

The aim of this study was to explore key stakeholders' perceptions on accommodating the communication needs of ESL learners in one southern Ontario community college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. A summary of the results of this study was made available to participants upon their request. The results of this study are also made available to participants through Brock University's Instructional Resource Library and at the James A. Gibson Library. As a faculty member at the college, I often participate in and present at professional development workshops within the college community. I have presented the results of this study at a college wide conference. My intent is to present the findings of this study at other such conferences or workshops.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore perceptions surrounding college ESL learner communication needs in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. Using a generic qualitative, descriptive, multimethod methodological approach (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 1998; Trochim, 2001), I analyzed multiple perspectives through individual interviews with administrators and faculty members as well as individual interviews and a focus group session with ESL students in these college programs. Transcriptions of these interviews as well as field notes and a reflective journal provided data on the ESL college learners' communication needs in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs of one southern Ontario college. These

interpretations contribute to understanding how best to accommodate the communication needs of college ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. The findings are presented in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to explore, understand, and describe the perceptions of one southern Ontario community college's administrators, faculty members, and ESL students of how the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs can most effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs. Using the generic qualitative research method, data were collected through individual and focus group interviews with participants from the three key stakeholder positions in the two programs. A thematic coding of transcribed interviews revealed six major themes with multiple subthemes. This chapter will describe and synthesize the multiple perspectives evident in the emerging themes and subthemes. The analysis of the data will result in addressing the study's four questions: (a) the communication needs of ESL learners in the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs, (b) the limitations in the ESL preparatory program currently in place for college ESL learners, (c) possible curriculum and instructional accommodations to foster college ESL learners' communication skills, and (d) possible organizational interventions for assisting college ESL learners.

Although participants had varying opinions at times, each individual alluded to the following six major themes: (a) opportunities for ESL learners, (b) ESL student characteristics in approaches to learning and social roles, (c) communication expectations placed on ESL students, (d) barriers to program completion and job placement, (e) personal and professional reputation, and (f) proposed solutions to accommodating and managing ESL learners' communication skills (see Table 3). Throughout the description and analysis of each major theme, I have highlighted connections between the themes and the research questions (see Appendix C: Alignment of Research Questions and Themes).

Table 3

The Results

Themes	Admin.	Faculty	Student
• Subthemes			
Opportunities for ESL Learners			
• Professional success	•	•	•
• Future studies	•		
• Personal gratification			•
ESL Student Characteristics: Approaches to Learning and Social Roles			
• Strengths: great potential, dedicated, motivated, first language, strong cognitive abilities, rich in experiences and knowledge	•	•	•
• Additional responsibilities	•		•
• Weak oral, listening, vocabulary skills		•	
• Possible learning disabilities		•	
• Traditional (transmission) learning style		•	•
• Struggles with cultural identity		•	
• Low self-esteem		•	
• Coping mechanisms		•	•
Communication Expectations Placed on ESL Students			
• Self-directed, responsible	•	•	•
• Collaborative		•	•
• Demonstrate deep learning		•	
• Communicate effectively	•	•	
• Math skills	•		
Barriers to Successful Program Completion and Job Placement			
• Cultural barriers	•	•	
• Difficulty learning	•	•	•
• Inability to find co-op placement	•	•	
• Self-perception	•		
• Lack of success in national certification exam	•	•	
• Difficulty maintaining employment			•
Personal and Professional Reputation			
• College's reputation amongst postsecondary institutions	•		
• Professional reputation	•		•
• Personal reputation	•	•	•
Proposed Solutions			
• Increase standards (of acceptance, internal program)	•	•	
• Pretesting	•	•	
• Mandatory support	•		•
• Presemester with an emphasis on professional vocabulary/content	•		
• Communications course with ESL component	•	•	•
• Content-specific ESL / communications courses		•	
• Build in communication skills in existing courses		•	
• Pre- / postlistening or reading activities		•	
• Audiovisual materials		•	
• Reduce class size		•	•
• Accessibility to knowledge			•

Opportunities for ESL Learners

The data revealed the notion of opportunity in terms of prospects for professional success, assimilation into Canadian society, and personal gratification. Reviewing how the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs offer opportunities to ESL learners is vital in uncovering how to assist these learners in realizing these prospects.

Administrators

Only one administrator who was interviewed brought forth the notion of opportunity. This participant initially discussed how the completion of her program presented ESL learners with the opportunity to succeed in their home country.

Many of them, more so now, are going back home, and they are getting jobs in a medical field or opening their own pharmacies, where in Canada, they can't at this point.

This administrator observed that the college's Pharmacy Technician program has given ESL graduates the knowledge and skills to succeed within their home country's health care professions. However, the above statement also alludes to the idea that ESL learners face some difficulty attaining the same level of success in Canada. Is the ESL graduates' level of communication skills negatively affecting their potential for success in the pharmacy profession in Canada?

Nevertheless, the same administrator also suggested that successful completion of her program offered ESL learners the opportunity to advance into practical nursing or nursing programs.

And some of them upon graduation from our program, they may go into the Practical Nursing or Nursing program.

ESL learners then gain the basic knowledge and skills to transition into a college Practical Nursing or Nursing program. The administrator further described how some ESL learners use the college's Pharmacy Technician program to upgrade their qualifications.

Some of our students may be a pharmacist in another country, and right now I think I have five pharmacists from India who are taking our program because their degree or qualifications don't meet the University of Toronto which is, at the present time, the only faculty of pharmacy in Ontario.

The college program offers ESL learners the opportunity to transfer their skills into the Canadian pharmaceutical profession.

The data revealed that only one administrator suggested the idea of opportunity for ESL learners. This result perhaps represents the administrators' limited view of potential opportunities offered to ESL graduates as a result of completing either the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician program.

Faculty Members

One faculty member who was interviewed viewed opportunity in an abstract manner relating to teaching ESL learners. She expressed her opinion of how this study might provide the tools to assist ESL learners in succeeding in the program and in their chosen profession.

I strongly hope that the college case is studied and looked at and try to help these students because they have a lot of potential. They have a lot to offer if given the opportunity to guide them appropriately.

This faculty member believes that ESL learners have the potential for success, particularly if faculty members assist them in their learning. What this statement suggests is the faculty member's hope that this study will determine practical means of assisting ESL learners at the college. The faculty member believes that ESL learners could have the opportunity to succeed if faculty members have the means to direct them appropriately.

Once again, the data revealed that only one faculty member discussed the notion of opportunity. This finding then could be associated with the faculty members' emphasis on assisting ESL learners, and perhaps one interpretation is that only by dealing with issues of accommodation could the idea of opportunity be brought forth.

Students

All of the ESL students who were interviewed expressed their reasons for choosing the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician program in terms of opportunity. One student suggested that enrolling in her program would help in understanding the Canadian medical system.

My husband went to hospital. He had a problem. When the doctor say the mechanical words, we just looking at him, don't understand the words ... I was totally confused. I don't know what he was asking. The words were really weird to me. So my husband said, "Learn something" ... because when we go to hospital, we need some knowledge about hospital.

The above statement suggests that the student's chosen program offers her the opportunity to assimilate into Canadian life by providing her with the language, knowledge, and skills to function within this country's health care system. This

participant's reason for enrolling in her program then was to enable her to assist her family in understanding the Canadian medical system.

Another student stated that completion of her program would ensure employment as well as personal gratification.

There is a demand for nurses, and I knew it. And it is a good job, a well-paid job. I mean, it's not only this ... finally after my divorce, I had lots of friends who were nurses, and they said do this because it is good for you. So I thought why not try it. Biology I always loved This is the field that I like, really what I like.

This student suggested that her chosen program offered her the opportunity to practice a profession that she has always been interested in but had to put off because of her family obligations and her social roles.

The ESL students in this study viewed opportunity in terms of the practical application of the knowledge and skills gained from the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs, such as assimilation into this country and employment. These participants also suggested a personal reason for pursuing studies in the two programs, such as a chance to realize a personal goal.

Link to Research Questions

By analyzing what the participants view as opportunities as a result of graduating from the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs, this study highlights the communication needs of ESL learners. There is a direct link between ESL learners' communicative competency and opportunities for (a) employment in Canada or in their countries of origin, (b) further studies in nursing or pharmacy, (c) assimilation into

Canadian life, and (d) personal gratification. This analysis in turn leads to articulating possible organizational, curriculum, and instructional interventions to assist learners in maximizing these potential opportunities. These potential interventions are explained in the section titled Proposed Solutions.

ESL Student Characteristics: Approaches to Learning and Social Roles

Inherent to understanding the challenges faced by administrators, faculty members, and students is recognition of what each participant determines to be key ESL student characteristics regarding learners' communication skills within the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. Approaches to learning and social roles define these ESL students' characteristics.

Administrators

All the administrators who were interviewed believe that ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs represent the traditional adult learner's characteristics because these ESL learners are motivated and have great potential for success in their studies. One administrator observed that learners who have Latin or Greek as a first language have an advantage concerning specific terminology needed in the two programs, even though they may have difficulty with English.

English is still a problem because of common phrases. The terminology that is used in pharmacy is very, very specific to medicine and pharmacy, and there may be a problem knowing the derivation of the words. Now, if the ESL student was of Italian or Spanish or Greek descent, they would not necessarily have the same disadvantage.

Another administrator offered her view of the ESL learners' strong cognitive abilities. The ESL learners' intuitive knowledge can help them through the challenges of adapting to a complex new culture, that of the health profession within a foreign country.

The International student who has newly arrived, newly immigrated, is at a huge disadvantage because it's not only getting used to a foreign culture ... as well as to the culture of the health profession, because the health professional culture is very different as well. When you look at it, and you reflect on it, and you see that these individuals struggle to achieve a passing grade, for example, it gives you some sense of how much sometimes intuitive knowledge, but also how bright they really are to be able to succeed in that kind of a milieu.

Related to approaches to learning, this administrator also observed the many complex steps ESL learners must follow when they learn specific terminology.

Most of them, what they do is they hear or see it in English, they translate it into their native language, and then they revert and they translate it back into English and then say it. It takes them an inordinate amount of time to learn what they really need to learn.

This administrator has witnessed the process which ESL learners go through to learn material. This participant's observation demonstrates that she feels the extensive time and effort in ESL learners' means of learning suggests a high level of dedication on their part.

One administrator stated that what she is most proud of in terms of the ESL students' characteristics is their commitment to hard work and their persistence.

They are probably more prepared than some other students that haven't had to work so hard. Their work dedication, for most of them, I think, that is probably it. And when they finish and they graduate.

This comment demonstrates the perception some administrators have of the ESL learners' level of dedication to achieving their academic goals.

The participants in this category also recognize that most ESL learners in the two programs struggle with balancing many responsibilities, including the challenge of being both a diligent student and a responsible, caring family and cultural group member. One administrator stated her view of the challenges ESL learners face in juggling family, work, and rigorous studies with limited English language skills.

When you consider that these students are all having to take x number of courses per semester. They also have a clinical piece to it, they also have a practice piece, then they've got children, they've got possibly a husband, they've got another job just to make ends meet. Able to do what we are expecting them to do within the time frame is probably next to impossible.

This administrator thus recognized that the ESL learners' context makes succeeding in the college courses very difficult. Nevertheless, one administrator summed up her perceptions of the influence ESL graduates will have on health care professions.

I feel very strongly that they are going to be the future of our health care in this country.

Although this administrator stated

I certainly don't want anybody else to think I am negative with respect to the international student [clarified she meant an ESL learner],

another administrator, when asked what she thought were the characteristics of ESL learners in her program, framed her thoughts from the perspective of “concern.”

One concern is they use some common phrases in terminology.

Another concern would be not reading English newspapers, not listening to English programs, not practicing English at home and within the classroom.

This could indicate a possible negative bias towards the ESL learners in her program.

Although only one administrator discussed ESL learners’ approaches to learning, most participants in this stakeholder group emphasized their perceptions of ESL learner characteristics in terms of these learners’ strong cognitive abilities, perseverance and enduring work ethic, and dedication to family responsibilities. Even though most administrators suggested that ESL learners are persistent, enthusiastic, and goal oriented, there may be a concern that these learners will not succeed because of their weak communication skills.

Faculty Members

Faculty members interact daily with ESL students, and those who were interviewed highlighted both positive and negative characteristics of these learners with respect to their approaches to learning. One faculty member emphasized the positive characteristics.

They [ESL learners] are very eager. They are good students in general.

They have good work ethics, they are very energetic, they are enthusiastic, and they have a good attitude about them. They are open to learning, and that is really good. That is a good base to start with.

Another faculty member stated that ESL learners bring previous studies including science to the courses, and thus eventually to the medical profession.

I think they bring a lot of richness, because a lot of them who come from other countries that have some sort of college level education. They are not just, like, you know, no education. They do have college education, and some of them have a science background.

One faculty member emphasized that the college's English for Academic Purposes program helps prepare ESL learners for rigorous programs such as the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs.

They should be able to do research, write research papers, they should be able to give academic presentations, right. They will have developed the skills for functioning in an academic environment and have the oral and literacy competency that is required in those two programs.

This faculty member believes that the college's EAP program provides ESL learners with the language and learning skills needed to succeed in the two programs.

At the same time, however, faculty members also stressed that ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs had weak oral, listening, and vocabulary skills. They suggested that ESL learners in these programs have difficulty with the pace and amount of content covered in the lectures. Further, they have difficulty communicating with classmates. One faculty member described this weakness in communicating their questions as a major concern.

Communication is the number one problem because, in my experience, I find they are unable to express what needs to be explored, what needs to be asked Their vocabulary is not where it should be.

Another faculty member described the learners' misunderstanding of the importance of accurate language use, a lack of skill that she feels will pose problems when the learner will work in her profession.

I have noticed that there are some English issues with respect to understanding in terms of what they think is the right level of communication and what the expected level of communication is. Because in the pharmacy program, it has to be as such that it's translated from the Latin onto a label, and they think that translating it from what their understanding of the English vocabulary is sufficient. So, I find that is very lacking.

One faculty member emphasized that her experience leads her to believe that some ESL students' difficulties in learning may be the result of learning disabilities, which introduces an additional challenge for some learners by exacerbating language problems.

They had other issues besides English ... they were ... actual learning disabilities, so it wasn't the language that, you know; was their weakness really. So I had a hodgepodge of students.

Faculty members in this study reflected on the learners' social roles from a cultural perspective. ESL learners' communication and learning limitations are further compounded by a need to sustain their cultural identity. One faculty member described

her perceptions of the learners' struggle in maintaining their cultural uniqueness through language use.

A lot of times I hear that at home they don't speak English because if they try to, they are trying to become Canadianized But, again the culture comes to play because the elderly don't perceive it as such. It's disrespectful. It's considered taboo to speak in another language but their own languages. But, I said, so great, at home you can't, but this is your opportunity to do that, to overcome that barrier. You don't have to answer to anybody. It's the classroom.

The faculty members who were interviewed concluded that students were employing a coping mechanism by speaking in their first language during class.

They probably feel a little more comfortable with each other because many of them are related. We have many students that have relatives that have enrolled in the same program: cousins, sisters, sisters-in-law.

Rather than taking the in-school opportunity to socially immerse themselves in English, learners pair with others of the same cultural background and first language, surmising that they can support one another throughout the program, thereby increasing their chances of success. One faculty member felt ESL learners should take advantage of the situation of having relatives or compatriots in class by practicing their English speaking skills with them.

I know it's easy to converse in your own language, but how easy it would be if you can polish your English skills while speaking to your colleagues, you know, who are in the same boat, who will not judge you because they

need the same help that you do? So, why not try it? So, I always encourage that, but how far I go with that, I don't know.

Even though faculty members recommend that ESL learners practice their English, another faculty member observed that ESL learners do not speak English even within the classroom.

Not practicing English at home, and within the classroom they tend to, many of the ESL students will form a little group and instead of speaking English, they speak their native tongue or language and it is not helping them, and I try to point out in the classroom when the door closes the instructions are in English and please everyone practice your English, whether it's anyone, doesn't matter who.

In addition, faculty members see the learners as having a traditional or transmission learning style that further inhibits improved communication. ESL students in their classes tend to memorize content, to not ask questions in class, to be relatively quiet during large group discussions, and to view faculty members as authority figures who are not to be challenged. One faculty member stated that ESL learners prefer lectures to interactive group activities.

I think, again, because of their culture, they are used to the typical lecture style format where they are told something and they absorb it: passive learning. I am trying to use the whole collaborative thing myself ... and I think some of them are resistant to that.

The same faculty member observed that ESL learners also prefer to have access to lecture notes so they can study the material which is presented in oral form.

But they definitely like to have something that they can touch and feel and go back to it. Like they need to have something they can refer back to, because I find that if I add a slide onto something I have already photocopied, they will sit there and write word for word so they can go back and reflect on as reference, and they need to have that hard copy.

However, one faculty member balanced this observation, noting that such characteristics are perhaps symptomatic of a larger issue. ESL learners' communicative competency is most likely a reflection of their low self-confidence in communicating in English. This finding could be associated with the learners' preference to work alone. The faculty members who were interviewed believe that these ESL learners lack the confidence in understanding the cultural nuances of oral communication. The students may also be afraid to say that they do not understand. One faculty member suggested that ESL learners do not have self-confidence because of their struggles with their cultural identity.

Self-esteem, a lot of them don't have it Their language abilities, again it could be their culture, you know, because they look different, they wear their own cultural attire, they may not feel comfortable, they may have this position "I'm not going to be part of that group because I'm not their kind."

Another faculty member described her perceptions of cultural differences when ESL students interact with patients.

I think some of it might be culture, and I don't know if this leads to ESL or not, but the way they approach a patient in order to get certain information, um, just little things like looking them in the eye versus not looking them in

the eye and certain types of information to ask for, they would not be comfortable with that.

Although the faculty members who were interviewed suggested ESL learners have positive characteristics as learners, such as a strong work ethic, eagerness to learn, and a science background, their comments also suggest that ESL learners' weak communication skills, compounded by their approaches to learning and cultural roles, deter them from learning content to the degree necessary to be a competent practical nurse or pharmacy technician.

Students

While the faculty members who were interviewed suggested that ESL students' low level of communicative competency may be associated with their approaches to learning and lack of immersion in English, the ESL students who were interviewed emphasized that these traits are, in fact, coping mechanisms. For example, one student described the additional time that is required for her to learn.

We don't know the requirement of teacher ... I think much more [time] because my classmates maybe they can just do a few hours before the due time or maybe just one day before, I can never do that. I must be prepared beforehand.

Another student added her perceptions of the time needed for her to complete an assignment.

Like when I say a simple one [written assignment], it takes me 2 days to finish. To find the material, put together, and check the problem.

One young woman expressed that when she does not understand the instructors, she asks her friend for clarification, while yet another described how she is a peer tutor for several ESL learners in her program. Given the additional time and effort needed for Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician ESL learners to succeed in their programs, they have discovered that learning with peers is a viable option.

While the ESL learners emphasized collaborating with peers during and outside class assists them in understanding content, on the other hand, they suggested that they prefer to work alone on marked assignments. One learner stated that she would advise other ESL learners not to engage in group assignments.

But most of the thing is work individually ... I don't believe the group work.

My preference is individual.

The ESL learners' preferred learning style of working alone on marked assignments could be associated with their communicative competency. One interpretation of this finding could be that ESL learners need to show their individual capabilities and gain marks for their own work and not be penalized for another person's mistakes. However, as one faculty member suggested, ESL learners have low-self confidence in their communication skills. Perhaps then working alone on marked assignments is a coping mechanism for ESL learners in terms of their roles within the academic environment. For ESL learners, working alone on marked assignments minimizes the additional effort and stress associated with communicating in English with other learners.

The ESL learners' social roles affect their ability to engage in learning. All adult learners face added responsibilities while in college, but these are exacerbated for many

ESL learners who may not have access to family support systems. One student explained how she balances academic and family responsibilities.

I have, like, a one-year old, so that is terrible for me because there is no one to take care of my baby. I, the one taking my baby to the day care. Like it is 7 miles, and then I come here and study.

This woman also revealed that her baby received injuries while in the babysitter's care and, because of this event, she was prepared to leave her studies if her mother-in-law was unable to come to Canada to assist.

So, I asked my mother-in-law here to help me, so she can help me with the baby, and my husband can help me with cooking, so I can have a little bit more time. Last term I almost quit.

Child care is an issue for many adult learners, but for an ESL student-parent, it can be an additional stress given that trusting family support systems are not easily accessible.

Another ESL student described her family situation and the added responsibility of being a parent and a student.

I am a single mother Like, my mom is helping me right now with my situation. If I was just by myself, it would probably be very, very difficult.

This participant suggested that without her family support, she would not be able to manage her roles as both a parent and a college student.

The ESL students interviewed for this study expressed how they approached their learning and how they balanced the responsibilities of a parent and a learner. Their approaches to learning, such as the additional time required to learn and to complete assignments, their tendency to work with peers outside the classroom, and their

preference to work individually on marked assignments, could be viewed as coping mechanisms because of their weak communication skills. Also, the ESL learners described their social roles, specifically their parent roles. According to these participants, without their family support systems, their role as a parent would make studying at the college level extremely challenging and might take priority over their studies.

Link to Research Questions

ESL students in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs have weak communication skills. These learners' characteristics in terms of approaches to learning and social roles define the communication needs with respect to the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. By exploring the ESL learners' positive characteristics, such as their strong cognitive abilities, dedication to learning, and previous knowledge, it is possible to focus on curriculum and instructional accommodation practices that build on these strengths. Similarly, analyzing the ESL learners' negative characteristics, such as their weak oral, listening, and vocabulary skills and their tendency to not immerse themselves in English in and out of the college context, will help uncover potential accommodation practices within the curricula to address these issues. Further, by investigating the effects of ESL learners' social roles, namely their cultural identities, on their communication skills and their learning, it is possible to determine curricular and instructional accommodations to foster ESL learners' communication skills. Similarly, bringing to light the challenges these ESL learners face in balancing their roles as parents and learners could suggest organizational and curricular adjustments to assist them in their learning. Overall, however, the results

indicate that despite the many qualities and skills of these learners that can lead to academic success, it is apparent that their communication skills emerge as the major barrier.

Another question which these characteristics also point to is the likely limitations in the ESL preparatory program offered at the college, at various adult learning centers, or at the high school level. What is interesting to note is that neither the administrators nor the faculty members who were interviewed had statistics on where the ESL learners were applying from. Also, even though the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) program at the college focuses on preparing ESL learners for more rigorous study, according to the administrators and faculty members who were interviewed, ESL learners in the two programs do not display competency in managing their learning because their approaches to learning and social roles may hinder this process.

Communication Expectations Placed on ESL Students

During the interviews, qualities such as self-directed learning, collaborative learning, a demonstration of deep learning of the content, and communicative competency are what the administrators and faculty members of the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs defined as the curricula's communication expectations. The ESL students who were interviewed, however, expressed the tendency to favour independent learning, sometimes at the expense of employing the other required skill sets and methods.

Administrators

Administrators of the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs assert that they strive to ensure a positive and inclusive learning experience for all students.

One administrator explained the measures she takes to make certain that ESL learners, in particular, are introduced to the support systems available.

I encourage on the first day to go to the career centre, and I have a survey, and the students are required to go around the college and locate the room number and at least one person, usually one person within the department ... and then they would find out what services were offered ... they also go to the academic advisement centre. Where is it located, and what services are provided? We introduce them, um, to the academic advisor for our program, and if they have any concerns about their academics, they are to make an appointment to see the academic advisor or feel free to e-mail her at any time ... so, we try to do this on the first day, the first class, so at least they know where there is help available...

The above statement indicates that this administrator expects ESL learners to be self-directed in accessing these support systems. In fact, the administrators who were interviewed have the opinion that all students need to be self-directed and responsible for their own learning. Administrators recognized the need for inclusion and equal opportunity so that ESL learners feel accepted into the program and are encouraged to succeed. However, they emphasized that ESL learners need to be aware of both when they need assistance and how to access support systems. One administrator described her perceptions of how an ESL learner's self-direction in terms of making use of support systems can translate into successful program completion.

Ask for assistance when it is offered and even when they have a question that they can't answer themselves, feel free to e-mail the instructor. They go past the program with no problem.

Furthermore, one participant, both an administrator and a faculty member, views all learners equally in terms of curriculum requirements and expectations.

I don't separate them from the other students. I mean, if you are in the [name] program, you are a [name of program] student If a student needs extra help, and they come to me, and they make an appointment with me....

However, administrators felt limited in being equipped to assist ESL students with their specific needs. In fact, one administrator who was interviewed strongly expressed that administrators are responsible for managing all learners in the same manner, and it is incumbent upon ESL learners to seek the support they specifically require.

And I am not going to give you special privileges. I just won't, because you have to meet a certain standard ... I will give them the extra help, regardless if they are ESL or somebody who was born and raised here. It doesn't matter. But if they don't come and ask me for extra help, then I am not going to seek you out. I've got 90 students as a co-ordinator teaching. I don't have that kind of time ... you don't want somebody that is going to be coddled. You want somebody that, at the end of their course, is able to be highly responsible for a human life.

This administrator highlighted that all learners, regardless of language or culture, must meet curriculum expectations, emphasizing, in particular, that the nursing and pharmacy professions demand precise communication skills.

It is interesting to note that one administrator in this study emphasized not only communication skills but also math skills as a possible problem for ESL learners. This administrator described how she provided feedback to faculty members who teach in the college's English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and Academic Upgrading courses concerning ESL learner weaknesses and needs.

We explained what our concerns were with the English and the math especially, and we gave (name of individual) the abbreviations, the common abbreviations, and the math from our dispensing manual and asked if they could be incorporated into the English that Upgrading was providing for people interested in the medical field.

According to this administrator, math skills are emphasized in her program's curriculum, and it is thus required that all learners demonstrate proficiency in math.

The administrators who were interviewed viewed curriculum expectations placed on ESL learners from an organizational perspective in terms of program standards and support systems. According to these participants, all learners' skills are measured against the same standard regardless of specific language needs. They suggested that support systems are in place to assist learners, but ESL students need to be self-directed in terms of accessing these support mechanisms. Further, one administrator suggested that the programs' rigorous curricula demand not only precise communication skills but also math skills.

Faculty Members

The faculty members who were interviewed articulated their perceptions of ESL learners' need for self-direction in accessing support systems, as indicated by some

administrators who also teach in their programs. However, faculty members further described how ESL learners must also demonstrate strong communicative competency and deep learning of the content. ESL learners must exhibit this higher order competency and learning by relating concepts to everyday practice and imparting the same knowledge to their peers in student-led conferences. One faculty member described her perceptions of the importance of effective communication skills in medical professions.

They [ESL learners] cannot sort of comprehend, um, the communication level that is required for the program ... because in nursing, you can't get away from communication because one's life depends on it, and if I'm talking to a physician during the night on one end, and I can't understand what you are saying, and assuming that I think I understand what you are saying, and I prescribe something to you, and assuming you heard it right, and you give it to the patient, whose life is at jeopardy?

The above statement underlines one of the many irrefutable standards of precise communication skills in the nursing and pharmacy professions. In fact, all learners must demonstrate a defined level of competency: a minimum mark of 60% in all nursing courses (increased to 70% in September 2008) and 90% in all pharmacy courses, both reflecting the demand for proficiency in these professions. Furthermore, the above comment reflects the demand for accountability standards to the profession and how language plays a role.

In order for students to achieve these high standards, the faculty members who were interviewed believe that all learners, including ESL learners, are required to demonstrate deep learning during assessment. Yet, faculty members expressed concern

that with ESL learners' tendency to use memorization as a predominant learning strategy, ESL students are not necessarily able to demonstrate either full comprehension or application of course content and concepts by merely exhibiting some understanding of content in a testing situation. One faculty member observed the divide between ESL learners' approach to learning and the teaching and evaluation strategies she uses.

I find they memorize stuff. They memorize pages and pages. How do they do it? I don't know, but what I find with that style is, as soon as they have done the test, it's out of the window. And so, my question to them is that how much are retaining it? ... I find a lot of them, a lot of them, memorize stuff which is not helpful in nursing because we have a variety of testing, um, methodology And they have to do a lot of research papers, you know? They have to do group work, so I don't know how they think that memory But again, I am not trying to stereotype. The majority of them think if they memorize stuff, they will get by.

Another curricular expectation placed on ESL learners is that they must be capable of participating in a variety of learning activities, especially collaborative activities that are highly dependent upon proficiency in communication. All of the faculty members who were interviewed specified that both the nursing and pharmacy professions require a collaborative work style, particularly in terms of disseminating information in a timely, clear fashion. Consequently, working in teams is emphasized in both programs' curricula, as is clear communication. ESL learners are frequently assessed in groups so that they may demonstrate a thorough understanding of the course content, its relevance to other team members, and a proficient application of knowledge

in words and actions. One faculty member emphasized the relevance of team work to the nursing profession.

I am strictly speaking from the profession they have chosen to come into.

This profession requires very strong communication skills. I mean, our whole profession depends on communication because it is a multidisciplinary profession. Like, we have multidisciplinary teams, so you cannot say in nursing one can just work alone. We never do. We can't, because we are dealing with human lives, and every discipline brings something different to the table. So, it's a real issue from the professional perspective that I'm not sure what kind of nurses we are training for the future if they don't have a strong level of communication skills.

Another faculty member described what happened when she used a collaborative learning strategy to reinforce communication skills between pharmacists and customers. The ESL learners in her class were unable to participate in the activity because they did not understand what to do.

I gave them different roles and responsibilities of pharmacist technician in a hospital and their 10 different roles, and then I said look at them and discuss five different activities. Nobody said, like nothing. So it could have been timing, it could have been that they needed more instruction, more coaching, because they said, "What are we supposed to do?"

Working collaboratively is, according to faculty members, an opportunity for learners to practice their team skills, thereby utilizing and improving communication skills. Thus,

faculty members expect learners to be able to work collaboratively as well as be willing to do so.

Co-op placement helps ESL learners with another expectation of competency within the programs, that of communicating effectively in a broad variety of situations related to practice. Placement in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs' co-op component also provides practical opportunities for ESL learners to improve their communication skills. One faculty member defined the co-op's positive influence on ESL learners' communication skills.

Our program is set up as that it is a co-op, so it forces them in a way to communicate in different styles and with different people and in different roles that they are not used to—out of their comfort zone, so it is a good thing that they are forced to do that Just in general, we find that our co-op students, when they go out and when they come back, there is a huge difference in terms of maturity and their acquisition of knowledge and communication skills.

This faculty member suggested that co-op placement is an opportunity for ESL learners to become immersed in the profession. During the co-op experience, students are required to build and practice their communication skills with hospital or pharmacy patients and staff.

It is interesting to note that the faculty members who were interviewed do not view their programs' curricula as problematic, but rather believe the low community college standard for acceptance into the programs is the greater issue. One faculty

member indicated that to her knowledge, the college does not detail a specific standard of communication skills before a student is accepted.

I don't think we have a standard, and that's the issue, is that there is no standards, and so we have some students who are coming into the program that is from another country and literally coming into the program the following week, into a program that is expected that they know English and that their education level or understanding is at a certain level. So, there is that issue already of trying to communicate with them. Just the basics of what's acceptable in terms of verbally...not even the education piece of it.

Another faculty member explained her perception of her program's curriculum in relation to ESL learners' communication abilities.

I am not sure that you can say that it has to do with curriculum. I think that if the person has the ability to speak, write, and read, the curriculum is definitely meeting their needs. But, again, we don't have the luxury to have everybody in the program to say they all speak, write, and read English.

The rigorous curricula, from the faculty members' perspective, are not problematic for ESL learners to successfully complete as long as these learners are able to communicate to the degree that is necessary for learning within the programs.

The faculty members who were interviewed believe that the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician curricula's expectations revolve around effective communication skills. The programs' curricula demand high standards necessary in medical professions. According to the participants in this category, ESL learners must demonstrate deep learning during assessment, work in teams, and

communicate effectively during co-op placement. However, according to faculty members, the learners' weak communication skills may hinder them from meeting these expectations. Further, faculty members emphasized that the programs' low acceptance standards and not the expectations of the curricula are the larger issue in terms of ESL learners meeting the programs' demands.

Students

All of the ESL students who were interviewed regarded curriculum expectations in terms of the amount and level of work required in the programs. They highlighted the pressures of reading and learning the material, doing presentations, writing assignments, completing in-class lab assignments, tests, and exams, and working collaboratively with other learners. One student described the stress of having to complete lab work during class time.

For lab, most time, the teacher will just hand out the notes beginning of class. Then, everything, like, you must finish in this lab, end of the lab.

And if you don't catch anything, maybe you will lose the mark. Like, every lab, you have a mark.

In describing the struggle to understand vocabulary and specific course terminology, one learner noted the additional time she needs to research terms.

For ESL students I think it is hard because a lot of the terminology in this course, if you are a foreigner, it is hard for you. For me, I have experience, like other people just understand and memorize something. For me, I need to always use my on-line dictionary when I study. So when the teacher is

teaching some terminology, I didn't answer. I need to go home to check my dictionary. So, that's a lot of work for ESL students.

The ESL learners in this study suggested that the programs' curricula are difficult for them because they do not play to the learners' strengths and preferred learning styles. Perhaps this response, which also reflects the faculty members' perspective, stems from the ESL student's sense of pressure to communicate competently within a group, yet lacking confidence in her communication skills to do so. When collaborative work was expected of them as a component of evaluation, one ESL learner explained the challenges of understanding and incorporating each group member's ideas.

It is hard to get together, or people have different backgrounds, and it is hard to pull everything together because this one has different thinking and things are different, so it is hard. Or even the understanding sometimes is hard, and maybe some frustration. Like, what do you mean or whatever, so. But, it happens, like we can finalize the product, but it is hard because, you know, like to explain to certain people, do this or do that, or they say why or they don't do it ... so we don't know if it is a barrier or, I don't know.

This learner expressed difficulty in working with others, not only because of her communication skills but also because she may not be used to being in learning situations where everyone does not express the same ideas. This learner also seems to be frustrated because the type of communication valued in Canadian culture is different from what she is used to. She may not be used to being questioned when she expresses an idea. Another ESL learner noted how she tends to turn to her preferred working style of independent study when faced with group work.

The difference is working as an individual, because group work, some people will do, and some people won't do.

She views working individually as a guarantee that the work would be completed and reflects her concern with the degree of commitment and the level of contribution from each group member.

Although they indicated that they understood the requirement of team work within their chosen professions as well as the emphasis placed on group interaction and strong language skills in the curricula, the ESL learners in this study did not cite improving in any of these as possible solutions to their struggles within the program. In fact, when asked what guidance they would offer a new ESL learner entering their program, all ESL learners who were interviewed stressed that having a strong work ethic and persistence were the key factors.

Even though there is maybe a second language, you don't give up, you keep going, you search, you research, sometimes you will get a bad mark, but just don't be disturbed But as long as you study ... you cannot stop. Every day you have to do something for this. It is hard, but you will be good at the end.

Another learner explained her perceptions of how an ESL student's level of dedication to his or her studies deters possible problems.

There is no problem. The only thing is they have to study hard.

The interesting word in the above verbatim is the word "they." The student clearly does not believe herself to be an ESL learner in the sense that her language abilities impede her communication skills.

ESL learners interviewed in this study noted that the fast-paced lab work, the specific vocabulary related to the programs, and the divide between their preferred transmission and individualistic learning style and the collaborative teaching strategies used in the curricula are the key challenges of their programs. Despite the fact that ESL students were clearly aware of their struggles within the program, they did not stress improved language competency as a solution. While still acknowledging the challenges posed in lacking English fluency, they clearly maintained that ESL learners who are willing to work hard will, most likely, meet expectations and complete the program successfully. There is an obvious lack of communication about the requirements of the program itself, especially the communicative aspect.

Link to Research Questions

The analysis of the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician curricula's communication expectations placed on ESL learners uncovers a gap between the ESL learners' existing communication skills and the necessary level of communicative competency required by the curricula. According to the administrators and faculty members interviewed, the programs' curricula demand self-direction, collaboration, demonstration of deep learning, precise math skills, and communicative competency both in the classroom and in the nursing and pharmacy professional contexts. The students interviewed in this study defined the gap by describing the additional time and effort needed to learn and complete assignments, their reluctance towards group work, and their preference to work alone on marked assignments. This gap between the curricula's communication expectations and the ESL learners' language abilities then could lead to

viable and meaningful curricular and instructional solutions that would take the administrators', faculty members', and ESL learners' concerns into consideration.

Barriers to Successful Program Completion and Job Placement

Emerging from the data is a confirmation that ESL learners have weak communication skills, potentially leading to a number of barriers in completing the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician program and, possibly, subsequent job placement. Arising from the research was evidence of barriers to learning, co-op placement, passing certification exams, working collaboratively, as well as cultural barriers.

Administrators

The administrators who were interviewed perceive ESL learners' weak communication skills as directly affecting the quality of their academic work. They feel that these weak communication skills may result in a misrepresentation of the learners' actual abilities and, consequently, dismissal from the program. Language competency includes not only mastery of basic English vocabulary and program terminology, but understanding cultural nuances as well. However, subtleties of one language rarely translate directly or equally in other tongues. One administrator emphasized the distinction between national culture and professional culture.

It is not just the culture of a different country or a different language. It is the culture of what health care is like. Healthcare has its own culture.

This administrator alluded to the idea that ESL learners need to manage both a new civic culture and health care culture where nuances in communication may not be interchangeable. Another administrator observed the difficulty ESL learners face with

understanding the difference between specific terminology and how terms are used in a cultural sense.

I think that they have a problem with learning. I mean, I can remember in a past experience where I was referring to doctors as physicians, and they did not know what is a physician? What do you mean by a clinical clerk and a resident and an intern? Because, in their countries, doctors are doctors, and sometimes they are referred to as Sir to demonstrate status, but they certainly are not familiar with that basic level. So that becomes a little bit problematic.

Co-op placement is an opportunity for ESL students to apply their knowledge, but for those with weak communication skills, demonstrating and expressing that knowledge can be problematic. Some administrators stressed that communicative competency is the key determinant for ESL learners' success in attaining an appropriate co-op placement.

We found that with the people that have difficulty finding a co-op placement, if they continue in the program with their academics, they may do very, very well, and in many cases, that's the case. But then they can't get their co-op work permit until they do upgrading or they practice their English.

Another administrator estimated that for this very reason it may take ESL learners longer to complete their program.

What would concern me are the numbers who are not successful. Who are taking 3 and 4 years to complete the program or else just drop out and become discouraged. And I would say that is about 25%.

Interestingly, the administrators who were interviewed generally concur that ESL learners do not identify themselves as ESL. In fact, from their experience, these students do not believe that English language competency affects their performance nor their demonstration of the curricula's learning objectives, objectives shared by the nursing and pharmacy professions. One administrator noted that during the program, ESL learners offered no feedback on the program, nor did they seek tutorial assistance. This administrator felt that it was unfortunate that ESL students approach administration only upon receiving a failing grade, and even then, it was only to express blame towards the college.

In my position, I am involved with ESL learners through the faculty that I manage. At times, I am faced with appeals and requests from ESL students who may be struggling with some courses, although they do not tend to identify themselves as ESL, nor do they indicate that they have a problem with English. My perception of the reason they have problems with other courses is that English is a barrier to some degree.

According to administrators, ESL learners do not understand how language incompetence could contribute to failure, but still hold that acceptance into the program, completion of assignments, and payment for enrolment should entitle them to graduate.

When, however, a student does successfully complete all program requirements, the next hurdle is the professional certification examination which Practical Nurses must pass in order to practice nursing in Canada. Pharmacy Technician graduates may write the Pharmacy Technician Certification Exam, an exam that is voluntary at present but

that will become mandatory in 2010. These exams can be a barrier to employment, as noted by one administrator.

The sad thing is some of these people go right through the 2 years thinking they are going to be a nurse, and they hit this wall, and they can't get through. And they are only allowed three chances to pass. If you fail on the third chance, that's it. You have to take the whole program over again. I don't know the stats on that. How many pass or how many actually go back and try to rewrite a second or third time, I don't know.

This individual then provided the Canadian provincial statistics of all nursing candidates who successfully completed the Practical Nursing National Certification Exam in 2006. Ontario ranked significantly lower than other provinces by 10–15% in passing rates, suggesting its postsecondary nursing programs are neither meeting the profession's standards nor fairly and adequately preparing its nursing graduates for the exam. However, these statistics do not identify individual students' results, nor do they break them down by geographical area, economic status, college attended, or any other factor. This kind of information, however, could prove to be beneficial to administrators in program and curriculum development.

Administrators who were interviewed described the barriers that ESL learners face in the two programs. They specified that understanding cultural and professional nuances, obtaining co-op placement, self-perception as an ESL learner, acknowledgement of the need to improve their communication skills, and passing professional certification exams are possible hurdles which ESL learners face because of their limited communicative competency.

Faculty Members

The faculty members who were interviewed also believe that weak communication skills pose several barriers to ESL students, the first of which is the impact placed on their ability to directly impart their actual knowledge and skills. Faculty members expressed concern because they felt that, without strong communication skills, ESL learners graduating from their programs will be unable to carry out their work.

Some of them have a science background, so it's not that they are not smart people, but it is just because, due to the barrier, they are unable to bring that smartness into their courses due to the barriers in writing and speaking and expressing themselves. And the key component, again, in nursing is if you cannot explain the problem, you cannot deal with it.

Like the administrators in this study, the faculty members who were interviewed understand that many ESL learners in the two programs have a wealth of experience and knowledge that cannot be easily accessed because of the language barrier. This makes formative evaluation a challenge. One faculty member stated her perception of the ESL learners' challenges in engaging in learning.

But more so because of communication ... when it comes to explaining, exploring, asking questions, because they can't really put into so many words what they would actually like to express, what they are trying to ask me, or trying to figure out. So, half the time, I end up filling in the blanks, you know? I think I am doing the right thing, but am I doing the right thing? I don't know. So that's what I am left with.

The above statement suggests a dilemma faculty members face. How do they help ESL learners express themselves without providing answers for them? The faculty members recognize the potential of the ESL learner, but they lack accepted solutions in assisting them.

Second, the faculty members who were interviewed stated that the ESL learners' communicative competency prevents them from getting a co-op placement, of which there are several in each program. This inability to obtain one or more co-op placements is a definite barrier to success in both academic and professional life because if ESL learners are not successful in their co-op terms, they cannot complete their programs. One faculty member suggested that these struggles may then foreshadow ESL learners' successes in the profession.

What is the first thing an employer is going to look at them, and forget about nursing, any profession, like if you are not even able to express yourself through the interview, you think, what are your chances of getting hired? Although faculty members did not have information detailing successful employment rates of their ESL graduates, one faculty member suspects ESL graduates may not receive fair and equitable opportunities from employers.

I think the success of our program has been a 100% placement, just in general. But the question is, like, how long did it take them to get that placement, right? Are they the last? What kind of wage are they earning? Are they earning the same as someone who is qualified, who speaks better English?

These questions illuminate key issues that go beyond the classroom and into the professional world. Even if ESL learners are successful in completing the program and passing the certification exam, will they find meaningful employment in the profession?

Finally, all the faculty members who were interviewed suggested that ESL learners in their programs struggle with a cultural barrier because not only do they contend with sustaining their cultural identity within a Canadian context, they also struggle to maintain that identity within a professional culture. The following statement also highlights that some ESL learners' behaviour is related to gender identity in some cultures.

It [nursing] is a female-dominated profession, and a lot of these females that I see, they are very subdued in their presentation. The concern that I have for the profession and these students, especially the female students, is assertiveness, like an issue of assertiveness, because there is a fine line between passivity and being assertive. And I see more of a passive behavior than the aggression side. It's very, very passive sometimes, and some might think the passive behavior is acceptance, but I really wonder if it is acceptance or just biding your time and get it over with and do what you have to do. I can't tell you that, but I see a lot of passive behavior. And a lot of times people may not be aware of that. Like, they don't have eye contact when you talk to them. Like, when I say a question in class, I find most of them look down. And again, it's not because they don't know the answer. It's, again, the cultural thing. They don't look into one's eyes who they consider authority ... I ask a question, I look right at the person,

and I think that might be intimidating to them. You know, I was brought up to say when you are talking to somebody, you have eye contact. Whereas in their culture, it's not appropriate to have eye contact, especially when you are talking to authority. You always look down, which is a sign of respect. But here, it is perceived as something else; that the person is dishonest or they're hiding something, so you can see how the cultures can clash.

This faculty member suggests that what is acceptable behaviour in one country is not valued in another and that this misunderstanding could pose a barrier to ESL learners both in the college and professional world. Also, faculty members stressed that ESL students in the two programs wrestle with expressing themselves accurately within the culture of their chosen profession.

It may be them finding the words to express ... "Do you have any allergies to medication?" as to saying, "Do you have problems with medication?", you know? I don't know if they don't know the language to express that, um, so we have had to go through that with them as well.

According to faculty members, ESL learners face the challenge not only of learning in a second language but also of grasping the specific language and cultural nuances of the profession. In a sense, ESL students are functioning in a language (cultural and professional nuance) within another language (English), almost like learning two languages simultaneously.

Faculty members viewed barriers emerging in the ESL learners' academic and professional contexts. The data from the faculty members' interviews suggest that

because of the ESL learners' weak communication skills, these learners face hurdles in learning, co-op placement, and functioning within the Canadian health care professional culture.

Students

The ESL students who were interviewed admitted that their language abilities are a barrier to their learning, but not necessarily an obstacle to their success in the program and to career placement. Students stressed that, at times, they cannot comprehend what instructors are saying, usually because they speak quickly.

The teacher/professor, like, their speaking speed. If they speak, like, regular, I can understand, but when the teachers speak sometimes very fast, sometimes I just don't.

In addition, one student expressed her frustration with demonstrating her knowledge of the content during evaluations.

Knowledge is based only on those tests, basically. They [marks] will reflect what you have done on the test. But sometimes you still have the knowledge, but some piece of that knowledge is not even checked because the questions from that chapter from one to another, and then it comes to the test and basically you are knowledgeable, but it doesn't reflect that you know this information because you miss something.

This ESL learner is clearly frustrated with testing as the main type of evaluation used in her program. According to this student, the testing does not provide her the opportunity to demonstrate what she knows. The same student also commented that not only are there limited opportunities for demonstrating her learning, the tests themselves may be faulty.

Or the teacher some weird question, and you didn't know it, which happens a lot. Or the wording of the question, the way that is impossible to understand. Like it is a phrase even for probably English born people here, it is hard to understand, they even. I found, like, some people asked the teacher, which were born here, I didn't understand what is it, it just could be the one sentence, one phrase, like, one word you don't understand. Because if you don't understand that word, you cannot really see what is A, B, C, or D, right answer, and that is wrong, and it is hard.

Some students expressed strong disappointment when they spent many hours preparing for assessments only to discover that their language abilities interfered with expressing their knowledge. During evaluations, some learners who were interviewed observed they do not have the same control as during assignments or self-study. The vocabulary or phrasing of questions can impede their understanding and, thus, they cannot offer core content knowledge.

Some ESL learners cited class size as a barrier to learning. Instructors simply do not have time to deal with language issues, given the large numbers of students in the classes they teach. Students suggested that one-on-one time with their instructors would assist them in understanding and managing content; however, one student had a realistic view of high student-teacher ratio.

Actually instructors can't come on each person. There are so many students, especially in pharmacy. We have like 120 or 130 students. Instructor can't come on each and every student and concentrate. Actually, students have to go and ask them.

Even though ESL students understand the need to approach faculty members, as previously noted by administrators and faculty members, they do not. This behaviour suggests that their weak communication skills, compounded by their views of authority figures, hinder their learning. One student in this study identified cultural barriers. Although not speaking directly from her own experiences, she observed how other ESL learners behave when they need assistance from instructors.

But some people they have a doubt, you have to go and ask the doubt to the instructor. And some people, I'm pretty sure they are shy to ask the teacher. This participant described how she noticed other ESL learners feeling shy around instructors, thereby not asking for clarification about content, assignments, and tests.

Two of the ESL students who were interviewed noted that co-op placement was the main reason for choosing this college's programs, seeing it as an obvious opportunity to gain experience in the profession.

I know this is a co-op program.

This is the only college that has co-op, so I took this course Like, co-op placement ... can help us.

However, the ESL students who were interviewed also understood that passing co-op does not guarantee success in the profession. One student commented on an ESL graduate's challenge with maintaining employment.

English is coming more to the co-op placement, with your co-op. You know, last semester, one of the students ... her English was really horrible. She passed the pharmacy. When she got into pharmacy, she could not speak

English, and they quit her job. They told her to leave her job. She was not on co-op, she was on job. The next day she went out.

The student elaborated that her fellow learner then had to take more English courses in order to get another job in the profession. It is apparent that neither passing co-op nor improving language abilities ensures their chosen livelihood, and this issue is of great concern to all stakeholders.

ESL learners focused on barriers as possible hurdles to learning. They described the pace of instructors' speaking, the limited opportunities for and type of evaluation, the wording in evaluations, and class size as possible impediments to their learning and imparting their knowledge. Interestingly, they viewed co-op as the reason for applying to this college's programs and not as a possible barrier to completing either program. One student emphasized, however, that completion of the program and job placement do not always translate into maintaining employment, as weakness in communication skills could lead to being fired.

Link to Research Questions

The barriers defined by the participants are multiple and overlapping. First, there are several barriers which ESL learners face in terms of completing their program that are the result of weak communication skills. Understanding and employing cultural nuances so as to impart knowledge and to advance learning as well as co-op placement are cited as barriers to completing either program. These data could lead to understanding the specific communication needs of ESL learners and to constructing curriculum and instructional accommodation practices to assist ESL learners. Issues related to job placement, such as passing professional certification exams and maintaining employment

despite weak communication skills, suggest organizational interventions which would maximize an ESL learner's opportunities to overcome such hurdles. Furthermore, by exploring barriers to successful program completion and job placement, it is apparent that the college's English preparatory programs may be a source of the ESL learners' problem in studying or practicing practical nursing or pharmacy. Moreover, examining the barriers students face could also lead to revising the college's preparatory program as a possible solution.

Personal and Professional Reputation

Administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners who were interviewed from the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs all expressed concerns regarding the reputation of the college and of themselves, as well as the issue of misrepresentation in course acceptance standards compared to the realities of curriculum expectations. From the data, there emerged a connection between reputation, both personal and professional, and the communicative competency of ESL learners in the two programs.

Administrators

One administrator stressed that all learners need to demonstrate the crucial knowledge and skills of the practical nursing or pharmacy technician professions.

In the end must attain the essential level, so I would not want to burden them with more time, academic load, or expense unnecessarily.

The key word in this comment is "attain," indicating perhaps that learners have the right and should have the opportunity to achieve their academic goals. However, other administrators are greatly concerned with the level of communication skills the

programs' ESL graduates demonstrate. Administrators believe that the communication skills of the programs' ESL graduates reflect the standards of the programs.

The administrators who were interviewed expressed concern with maintaining the programs' fine reputations amongst postsecondary institutions. It is not surprising, then, that they stressed the importance of building partnerships with other colleges and universities. One administrator discussed the college's struggle to develop a pathway with universities.

We are working with the University of Toronto and the University of Waterloo for a pathway for our graduates to be academically of sound foundation as the applicants for the faculties of pharmacy to become pharmacists.

This pathway, according to the administrator, would enable successful graduates of the college's Pharmacy Technician program to transfer into the university's pharmacy program at the second-year level. If the college's diploma were to be viewed as equivalent to a first-year university program, then surely the status of the college program would be enhanced in the academic world and professional pharmaceutical community.

Students that are graduating, it's just not our programs, it's all of Ontario, are very weak in English skills. They cannot put sentences together. They cannot spell. They [the professional community] are really getting fed up with the quality that is being put out there, and these are supposed to be university and college grads. The doctors are getting upset. They're saying they can't understand what this nurse has written here. It doesn't make any sense to me because of their spelling and their grammar ... I've got to put up

other things to make sure that we are putting out a quality product, and not one that is going to cause huge issues when they are on the nursing floor And, if they cannot communicate properly with the other health care providers, being other nurses or doctors, yes, people are going to be injured or die from it because of a communication lapse.

Some of the administrators in this study worry that many ESL graduates are not practice-ready because of weak communication skills and that this weakness, in turn, reflects poorly on the credibility of the program. One administrator expressed her concern with program standards being lowered to accommodate students' abilities.

What concerns me, though, is rather than address that issue [ESL learners' communication skills], the program is being, well, in some respect, I believe that the standard is being lowered in order that everybody is successful, because the primary intent is money. And as long as you can have the student paying the money ... and they don't want them to fail out. But in order to make them successful, they are lowering the standards to a certain extent.

According to some administrators, if the standards are being adjusted to guarantee that students are successful in the program in order to secure student fees and government funding, the quality of graduates will be jeopardized. One administrator suggested that as a result of lowered standards the college's reputation might be at risk.

But the other colleges who have nursing programs do pretest. They do a different standard, and [college's name] is now getting the reputation as

being the college that people go to if they are not successful in the others.

We are getting an increased number of students transferring in as a result.

Most administrators believe that the college falsely advertises that admission into programs means that ESL students have the potential to successfully complete them. One administrator specified what she perceives to be the students' financial and emotional investment in learning.

If we ask the students to drop the course once they have bought their books and have made plans to finish the program hopefully within the 2 year time period, this could be financially disruptive, and self-confidence could be destroyed.

Another administrator articulated her idea of how the college may be falsely leading ESL students into believing they have a realistic chance of successfully completing the Practical Nursing program.

It is false advertising. You've got students coming in really thinking, "We could be nurses." They could never be a nurse. They don't have the mentality for it. And some of them maybe, but the road they travel is very rough and hard for them. Have we given them a fair chance?

Administrators believe that the college, by simply admitting ESL learners into the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs, is giving them false hope that they will become nurses or pharmacists. These administrators believe that ESL learners in their programs face the likelihood that they will not successfully complete their programs because their communication skills prevent them from doing so.

In all of the above examples, administrators believe that both the programs' and the college's reputations are at risk, and it appears that three lines of thought are emerging: one that believes all learners have the right to obtain an education for meaningful employment; a second that values maintaining a previously set high standard and being able to develop partnerships with other respected academic institutions; and a third which is concerned with the quality of graduates associated with the college.

Some of the administrators who were interviewed were also concerned with how the learners' second-language problems are affecting the administrators' professional reputations. One administrator described her frustration with her program and expressed concern with being associated with poor-quality graduates.

Why make it easier? Because all you are going to do is put out a faulty product, not a good product, and I don't want my name attached to a faulty product. I'm getting out of the production line then. I'll go to another place that will let me put out a good product, because I don't want to get sick in Ontario You know, we are not pushing paper. We are dealing with human lives, and if it is not the student that you really care about, at least care about the patient that we are sending them to look after.

There are several aspects to consider here, not the least of which is the elevated stress level some administrators have expressed. Administrators feel weighed down trying to balance maintaining the programs' strong reputation, supporting policies which invite learners into the programs, and producing graduates who meet the high standards of the professional and academic worlds. It is interesting to note, however, that none of the administrators blamed the quality of the preparatory English-language courses such as

the EAP for the poor quality of ESL learners' communication skills when they enter the program.

Faculty Members

The faculty members who were interviewed, on the other hand, emphasized the reputation of "self" from the learners' perspective, a perspective central to their relationship with the learners. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, faculty members believe that ESL learners in the two programs have low self-esteem because of their weak language skills. The ESL learners' low self-esteem, according to faculty members, is connected to how others perceive them and their reputation among other learners. One faculty member observed how ESL learners in her courses react to their failure in assignments or tests.

I know though, as an observation, that ESL students were more anxious.

Like, they didn't deal with the disappointments as well as the other students, and again, I don't know if it is cultural, or if it is because they didn't have a way of communicating their frustrations, or I don't know what that issue was. But, I felt like they didn't handle it as well as the other students.

Another faculty member, who also has an administrator role, stated her opinion that the learners' self-esteem is related to their language level.

Their language abilities ... I think it has a lot to do with self-esteem.

According to the faculty members who were interviewed, issues of self-confidence in ESL learners could be related to how others perceive them, such as the incident in which an ESL learner felt belittled because of her communication skills.

We had a student last year who was a very intelligent girl on paper, but she was [ethnic group], and who could hardly speak English. So, she was in my course where we took the study of diseases, and everybody had to present. And, what they were presenting was to actually teach their classmates, and then I mark them on it. Now, the information she gave me in paper form was fine, but she could not speak in English well enough for her own classmates to understand her. They revolted against her. They were angry. “We’re not going to learn from her. We didn’t understand a damn thing she said. What are you doing? This is the wrong way.” Up to that point, they liked the idea, and then she stood up, and they didn’t understand a word she had to say. They were furious. They didn’t want to be tested on any of this stuff that she had delivered that day.

Although the emphasis of the excerpt is that the ESL learner was perceived negatively by her peers, it may also indicate that the instructor, who in fact is also an administrator, was affected in that she was accused of not creating fair and reasonable assignments.

Unlike the administrators who focused on the reputation of the college and of themselves as professionals, reputation from the faculty members’ perspective emphasized their concerns with how ESL learners feel about their evaluations, their language use, and how peers perceive them. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, collaborative learning in terms of working and learning through and with other learners is expected of students in the programs. However, faculty members worry that ESL learners’ reputation could be jeopardized because of their weak communication skills.

Students

The ESL students who were interviewed shed a different light on the issue of reputation. They wish to have the reputation of being productive family members and successful learners.

We are all, like, mostly the adult students, so we don't want to be behind like 3 months, because if you don't pass, then you have in 3 months ... and then another 3 months or whatever, so you are very frustrated because you are paying lots of money for it, and your family is behind you.

The ESL learners who were interviewed stressed that they must succeed in the program because family members depend on their success. Yet, as mentioned previously, they must also adjust their family life and support systems in order to balance academic and family responsibilities. One student suggested that she places high demands on herself as a learner for her family's sake.

I want to do well for my children, so like to provide for them.

Attaining the educational and professional goals she has established for herself is her first priority because her family depends on her for their betterment.

The ESL learners' perceptions of their reputation as learners are evident in how they described overcoming their fears in their first co-op placement. One learner described how during her first co-op placement, she was not as comfortable with her skills as she is currently, therefore indirectly also expressing her concern with her professional reputation.

I was afraid that my knowledge was not yet there because there was always the fear you don't want to harm the patient or you don't want to do any

mistake. More confident. Like, I think this semester finally I am very confident, but the second semester was you're afraid, because the medical field is risky.

One ESL learner emphasized her fear of not communicating effectively with other ESL professionals and how this lack of communication reflects poorly on her professional reputation. She highlighted her concern with miscommunication being an ESL professional and working with other ESL professionals.

But I think you always have a fear that it is your second language. And this is a profession that maybe when you are going to work, you maybe going to miss something. Or you're going to work with somebody else who will be as well a second language and tells you something, and you are not going to understand, or you are going to have a misunderstanding. And it could be bad on you, or you could make an error. So it's a risk involved as well, so I think you need to know what your expectations are. How you communicate with others is very important.

Effective communication, though very important in the nursing and pharmacy professions, is also of concern for this ESL student in the sense that she will be a professional who will most likely practice in her second language. If she then works with other professionals who have English as their second language, there is the added fear that they may need to prove themselves, or worse, they may not fully understand each other and therefore possibly endanger life. Are ESL learners, then, judging themselves solely by how well they communicate in English and to the exclusion of their nursing or

pharmacist abilities? English language skills then, according to the ESL learners in this study, are directly connected with their professional reputations.

The ESL learners who were interviewed described personal reputation in the sense that their families are dependent on their completion of their studies and finding employment. From a professional perspective, ESL learners were concerned that their level of communication skills would affect their career.

Link to Research Questions

The above section suggests participants' differing agendas: Administrators want to sustain their professional reputation which is closely associated with the programs' and college's reputation; faculty members are concerned with ESL learners' reputation and how it affects the classroom experience; and ESL students described the pressure to succeed and the challenges they face in maintaining their ability to study within the context of an unfamiliar language and cultural expectations that are difficult to understand. The administrator perspective highlights the forces that could foster or hinder organizational interventions to assist ESL learners. Further, the faculty member and ESL learner perspectives shed light on the specific communication needs of these ESL learners and aid in understanding how the programs' curricula and instructional strategies might enhance their communication skills so as to advance their personal and professional reputations.

Proposed Solutions

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician curricula's expectations placed on ESL learners are that they be self-directed, collaborative, and competent practitioners with effective communication skills.

Participants' descriptions of the current situation seem to suggest that ESL learners have access to support systems such as program advisors, individual support from instructors, and tutoring services through the college's career center. Still, everyone interviewed identified communication skills as a weakness for ESL learners in both programs, and each stakeholder group proposed solutions to offset this weakness.

Administrators

The administrators who were interviewed offered solutions concerning policy and curriculum and suggested two approaches. One approach considers what to do before an ESL student is admitted into the programs, and the second highlights what to do to assist ESL learners while studying in the two programs.

Increasing college acceptance standards and pretesting were strongly emphasized by some administrators as the only solutions to ensuring that ESL learners accepted into the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs had the communicative competency to complete either program. Given that ESL learners are coming from high school ESL programs, adult learning centers, or the college's ESL preparatory program, increasing the college's acceptance standards and pretesting for language competency would eliminate any discrepancy between the ESL learners' previous marks and their expected abilities to perform at the college level.

Do some pretesting, find out where the weak students are, and hold them back. Don't have them come into the program where they've got to learn a brand new language, do critical thinking. Make it where they have to go another year and have this pharmacology type math, have the English skills, then, if they do well, allow them to come in So, if they get a B or better,

then yes, come into the program, and we will start from there. But the way it is now, it's more or less we get paid by the seats, so get how many students you can in here, and let's fill them up, regardless So, therefore, you have to address English as a second language, and not put it in a program, but give it to them before. It has to be something that is assessed before they are allowed to come into the program. And then, give them the proper information they need So, if the high schools are not going to police better, then we have to do our job by doing our pretesting, assessing the students better, because I see it as false advertising. Yeah, you can come in here. Yeah, you can take our course, not a problem. Can you complete it?

The above statement emphasizes the frustration some administrators feel when trying to manage program acceptance rates as well as ensuring a quality learning experience. This administrator suggested that acceptance into a program should not simply be a student's right as a paying consumer of knowledge but rather a genuine opportunity for student success. Therefore, pretesting students, which some may see as an infringement of one's right to learn, is, in fact, according to some administrators, a more genuine approach to assisting ESL learners because it provides access to learning within a context where they can be successful.

While one administrator holds that all learners have the right to study within any program of their choice and that the program should not include any additional cost or time for the learners, the majority of the administrators who were interviewed believe there are several practical ways to accommodate ESL learners' communication needs,

particularly specific to their two programs of study, so that students' rights, responsibilities, and resources are all respected. Some administrators suggested mandatory support for the learners in the form of a tutorial geared towards these particular students.

We may have to offer more support, like incorporate more mandatory tutorials. And the college would have to support the personnel to do that.

One administrator recommended longer semesters for ESL learners, during which time they would learn course content as well as improve necessary English language skills.

It might be extending the length of the program-maybe extending it for the international student, and I have discussed that previously with my colleagues-but have it so that there is an ESL piece, initially, and there is a math piece, and there is an English piece, so that you at least know the grammar effective. And do that and integrate it, with, say, anatomy and physiology. So, instead of having anatomy and physiology concluded at the end of 14 weeks, maybe it's going to take you 72 weeks.

All administrators discussed the existing communication course which is mandatory for all learners in the programs and which is designed to dramatically improve ESL students' mastery of the English language.

All students are tested prior to entering the program in order to place them in an appropriate communications, English, course with the intention of fulfilling the essential communication skills required by federal law across Canada for college graduates.

According to administrators, this is a positive step in terms of assisting ESL learners with their communication skills. However, one administrator suggested that the current placement process should have three levels of testing so as to include the needs of ESL learners.

Perhaps the testing could include an essential, a basic, and an ESL level. Furthermore, another administrator suggested the communication course's passing grade be increased from the current 50%.

But the passing grade shouldn't be 50%, I don't feel, because that is giving the student their own sense of confidence.

This administrator believes that that mark does not definitively demonstrate course effectiveness and tends to give students a false sense of confidence in their language abilities.

Some administrators also suggested a content-dedicated ESL course that would assist ESL learners with curriculum, terminology, and communication skills specific to nursing or pharmacy. One administrator described another college's model for content-specific ESL courses.

They have actually had ESL instructors instructing the students in the morning and in the afternoon, then they get their classes related to health, but taught in a similar fashion as they would have been taught by ESL faculty.

The model described by this administrator could be applied to the college's current ESL preparatory program.

The administrators' suggestions for assisting ESL learners in the two programs ranged from increasing acceptance standards and pretesting to including mandatory support, a reevaluation of the communications course currently offered, and content-specific instruction for ESL learners. The only barrier administrators alluded to in implementing the above recommendations was related to additional costs in terms of staff and time to support these initiatives.

Faculty Members

The faculty members who were interviewed also voiced interest in pretesting, increased standards, and communication courses with an ESL component, but they further emphasized solutions pertaining to the existing programs' curricula. One faculty member stressed the importance of providing meaningful support for ESL learners.

If you give the person proper tools, they will do the job properly. Ninety percent of the time, they will do the job properly. But, if you do not provide them with the proper tools, you can't expect the person to do the job properly. And I think as an institution we are lacking that. We are strongly lacking that, to reach these foreign students or ESL students' full potential, because I don't think we are providing them with all the tools that they need.

We are giving them some, but not all.

This quotation exemplifies the unique relationship between the learners and faculty members. This participant believes that all students, not only ESL learners, need support in order to succeed, and that the college is responsible for providing it.

Another faculty member suggested paying closer attention to incorporating a communications and critical thinking component within the programs' currently offered

courses. This faculty member also alluded to systemic program evaluation to assess which of the programs' courses could be modified to emphasize these skills.

I think that continuing with this development of communication skills, not only in a communication course but in the content areas, would be very, very beneficial. And not only in the first year, but throughout all the years of the programs, so there is an emphasis on developing the communication skills of all students. And, I think that in this way, I mean, you would also develop students' critical thinking skills... Maybe there needs to be maybe a more systemic look at programs and see in what courses these communication skills could be developed and how these courses could be modified, how these sorts of things could be built in, because maybe there are courses and programs that lend themselves to developing the communication skills.

The communication and critical thinking skills that this faculty member described are the Essential Employability Skills that the Ontario government is demanding of all college graduates. This faculty member believes that all learners in the programs, including ESL students, would benefit from more opportunities to improve communication skills and critical thinking skills.

Coinciding with the above quotation is another faculty member's belief that building effective communication skills is an ongoing process in each individual.

I look at myself, I continue to work on my communications skills because that is one area that nobody, I have not met a single person who can honestly say that they're perfect in their communication. I have been asked

many times this question during interviews, like what is the area that you would like to improve on, and I always bring communication, because I say what works with one individual does not necessarily work with another.

From these faculty members' perspective, improving communication skills would be beneficial to all students, not just to ESL students. The current nursing and pharmacy programs tend to deal with effective communication skills from a theoretical perspective rather than specifically within the context of the professions. To do so, curriculum designers in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs would require additional time to fully consider and meet ESL learners' communication needs.

Relating more specifically to ESL learners' needs, the faculty members who were interviewed stressed the relevance of a content-specific communications course. One faculty member stated the benefit of course content intertwined with the communication course.

I think that it needs to be tailored to the pharmacy program. It is beneficial that they know the basics in terms of how to write a sentence and how to write an essay and how to do research, but what I am finding is that there is little issues, like for example, I keep going back to the whole labeling ... it needs ... to be formatted to a certain program. So, if somebody knows they are going to be teaching pharmacy students or nursing students, it needs to be focused more towards that.

Such a course would be beneficial to strengthen ESL learners' communication skills and would enable them at the same time to advance in the content specific to their program.

From an instructional perspective, one faculty member emphasized that instructors could incorporate pre- and postlistening and reading activities to help solidify terminology and key concepts.

If we are dealing with a content area that is new, we might provide vocabulary or key words ... we do a lot of prelistening or prereading work, so that their general knowledge about the subject is tapped before they dive in. And we are always sort of providing support in terms of if they are going to have a listening assignment or a lecture, we kind of tell them what we want them to listen for, what the purpose is. We identify things like that so that they are prepared for the task. And then, of course, there is the postlistening or the postreading work so that the content that they have assimilated is discussed. So, those kinds of things would be useful.

Another faculty member suggested using audiovisual aids to enhance the ESL learners' understanding of concepts.

We tried to provide a textbook that has a CD so that they can hear the pronunciations, they can see the pictures. And, I try to incorporate little pictures, like, for the side effects of medications. Put little picture clips in so they can see it.

These types of teaching strategies, according to this faculty member, would provide an additional opportunity for ESL learners to engage in their program's content and terminology.

As stated earlier in this chapter, faculty members view the programs' standards of acceptance as nonexistent. Any student who completes the prerequisites can, technically,

be accepted into the programs. Therefore, all faculty members recommended that course programs have internal high prerequisite standards that may, perhaps, serve as a sorting process.

So what they do, they come for their first semester, and then they do their second semester, and then they do their co-op, and then they go back to their third semester. They do their second community co-op, and then they come back to do their fourth semester, and then their hospital at the end. So, that again might be another issue. I don't see that until afterwards, and usually by then, the fourth-year students, the ones that have graduated, have a pretty good, they are communicating on a higher level. And I don't know if it's because they have been weeded out. I don't want to say that word, but they have not made it through to the fourth level. But by then, most are fluent both in their language in terms of communication verbally, and also in their written communication.

As stated by administrators, standards for completing the programs are quite demanding and nearly impossible for ESL learners. The faculty members who were interviewed proposed that increasing the programs' standards will ensure that graduates have communicative competency, but they also recognized that these same expectations can result in very anxious ESL learners. To counter this, they suggested one-on-one instructor-student meetings to clarify content and assignments. However, the faculty members interviewed appeared uncertain as to how to manage such interventions with class sizes of 75-90 students.

The faculty members' recommendations for assisting ESL learners focused on both organizational suggestions, such as increased internal program standards and pretesting, and curricular and instructional propositions including an emphasis on communication skills built into courses, a content-specific communications course, and teaching strategies catered to ESL listening and reading needs. As indicated at the beginning of this section, faculty members' suggestions point out that it is generally the responsibility of the college as an organization to provide ESL learners with the tools to succeed in the programs.

Students

The ESL students who were interviewed offered three practical solutions to accommodating their communication needs, which would, in their estimation, ensure success in the programs.

First, most ESL learners suggested the programs offer mandatory tutorials as part of the program.

It is like a regular class. It's regular, and the students can maybe bring the question to the teacher and teacher can focus on things.

Another learner added that ESL student study groups led by instructors would assist learners with content, assignments, and studying.

Maybe something like group, like, they can meet afterwards. Like, with certain students, like, if they know maybe need certain attention or they need some help Yeah, and they can kind of emphasize, "Go here" because they know, like, they know where they can find extra help.

During this study group, ESL learners would receive assistance with understanding content and vocabulary, starting assignments, and studying for tests. When administration creates such mandatory tutorials or study groups, smaller class sizes would also be created in which one-on-one time between teachers and students would be increased. One learner suggested her program offer multiple sections of the same course in order to reduce the number of students per course.

You can have smaller classes. You can have two batches. My preference is, like last year (name of instructor) class was, like, we had 200 students, like, so many, we could not concentrate. So many people failed in that subject. You need 70% to pass. My preference would be to have two batches so that it would be good for them to understand and ask doubts. If they have more and more doubts, they can ask. Otherwise, while in a group, some people cannot catch immediately. So, my preference is having two batches. Less people. That's good.

From this learner's perspective, decreased staff-student ratios will surely increase students' participation, especially around issues of obtaining assistance in understanding content. According to this ESL student, having fewer students in the class would allow her to ask questions when she does not understand the content.

Second, ESL students expressed interest in receiving a content-specific communications course in place of the general communications course, currently part of the two programs' curricula. One learner offered her perception that the current communications course is irrelevant to her chosen profession.

But from our point of view, being in a nursing program, we thought that this program [communications course] is going to be more medical, kind of more towards nursing program. But it was totally like writing about some books or some research about something that was not even related ... like everybody didn't like it. It was a waste of time for us because we wanted to dwell on the nursing related things. So we even talked to the instructor, and he agreed with us that this was supposed to be for us, ESL, like maybe medical or writing or spelling or practicing.

The key words to be highlighted in the above comment are “this was supposed to be for us, ESL.” This student not only presents the idea of a nursing-specific communications course, but she also suggests the need for an ESL communications stream.

And third, some ESL learners suggested the notion of accessibility to knowledge.

One student discusses presemester access to content.

Like, there was a whole summer. I could have studied something, right?

And they could maybe put it on-line and what sort of books we could have already, so we could have purchased them before and looked at them. But then you come to school, and they say you could have bought the book, but certain teachers they don't like that book or whatever. Just, it would be nice to know before, maybe.

The student described that although the reading lists may be available to students in advance of the semester, the readings may change by the time the courses start.

Nevertheless, this ESL learner suggested that making material accessible before a term

begins would provide her with more time to review the readings and content. This recommendation complements the administrators' encouragement to provide more time for ESL students to learn course content. There are lapses of time in which students could prepare ahead for courses, and, as stated previously, anything which reduces the commitment of time would be significant to ESL learners who may grapple with large amounts of new course materials and terminology, added family responsibilities, laborious translations, and subtle cultural nuances in language and application.

The ESL students' perspective on solutions focused on three practical measures to assist them. First, they indicated that a system of mandatory tutorials where ESL learners could go for assistance would be beneficial to them in completing assignments, understanding content, and preparing for evaluations. Second, they indicated that a program-focused communications course would be more meaningful to their learning than the current communications course curriculum. And third, they suggested that their program provide them with access to content during off-semester, when the learners could review key concepts before the term begins.

Link to Research Questions

The administrators', faculty members', and ESL learners' suggestions for managing the learners' weak communication skills, synthesized herein, range in focus from: (a) organizational interventions, such as increased program acceptance and completion standards, pretesting, longer semesters, and reduced class sizes, to (b) curriculum accommodations, such as mandatory support, a content-specific focus to the current communications course curriculum, content-specific ESL instruction, and accessibility to knowledge, and to (c) instructional strategies, such as pre- and

postlistening and reading activities and audiovisual aids. These suggestions not only point to methods for assisting ESL learners in both programs but also suggest that some of the curriculum accommodations relating to content focus be adapted into the ESL preparatory program, although very few participants specifically referred to the preparatory program. Furthermore, the participants' insights into possible solutions in accommodating ESL students' language needs could be linked to their perceptions of professional and personal reputations.

Common Themes

The data revealed that there are six common subthemes in all three stakeholders' perspectives (see Table 3). All stakeholders discussed:

1. professional success as a potential opportunity as a result of completing the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs;
2. ESL student characteristics in terms of their dedication and motivation;
3. the programs' expectation that ESL learners be self-directed and responsible;
4. difficulty in learning as a barrier for ESL learners' successful completion of the programs and subsequent job placement;
5. a risk to one's personal reputation as a result of the ESL learners' communicative competency;
6. a proposed solution could be a communications course with an ESL component.

Although the analysis of the data emphasized the stakeholder groups' differences and similarities in perception, the common subthemes discussed by the three stakeholder groups describe a collective interpretation of ESL learners' experiences in the college's

two programs. These common subthemes highlight the essence of the three perspectives and lead to uncovering the forces working against and in favour of accommodating college ESL learners' communication needs. This analysis is discussed in Chapter Five.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of Chapter Four was to present and analyze research findings that focused on administrators', faculty members', and ESL learners' perspectives on how the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician college programs can most effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs. A thematic coding approach of the data revealed six major themes surrounding the main research questions: (a) opportunities for ESL learners, (b) ESL student characteristics concerning approaches to learning and social roles, (c) communication expectations placed on ESL learners, (d) barriers to program completion and job placement, (e) personal and professional reputation, and (f) proposed solutions. Each major theme was then reinforced by minor themes which highlighted the multiple perspectives of administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners involved in the two programs. The construction and examination of the participants' perspectives brought to light a multitude of issues, concerns, and possible solutions in assisting ESL learners in these two college programs. Because of the ESL learners' weak communication skills, they are struggling to complete their program, faculty are burdened with finding ways to assist them, and administrators are frustrated with balancing inclusive learning opportunities within credible and quality educational programs. What the analysis of the data has confirmed is that program evaluation must include the voices of key stakeholders and that solutions to accommodating ESL learners in the two programs must take into consideration the key issues explored in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND IMPLICATIONS

In gathering data from one southern Ontario community college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician program administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners, the purpose of this inquiry was to explore, understand, and determine from these stakeholders' perspectives how the two programs can most effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs. The study was conducted using a generic qualitative approach (Merriam, 1998), framed by the constructivist and critical perspectives. While the purpose of Chapter Four was to construct and present the findings of this study, Chapter Five will analyze the findings from a critical perspective in order to understand the underlying issues associated with the study's major themes.

Summary of the Study

Highly effective communication skills are required in health professions, yet the communication needs of ESL learners in one southern Ontario college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs are not always being fully met. Even though ESL learners are accepted into the two programs, the success rate for completion of the programs and subsequent work placement is dependent on their communication skills. Data gathered from the administrator, faculty member, and ESL learner perspectives allowed me to explore, understand, and describe how the two programs can more effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs. The four questions addressed were:

1. What are communication needs of ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs?

2. Are there any limitations in the ESL preparatory program currently in place for college ESL learners? If so, what are those limitations?
3. What kinds of curriculum and instructional accommodations should these programs consider in order to foster ESL learners' communication skills?
4. What kinds of organizational interventions are most effective in assisting college ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs? (see Appendix C for alignment of research questions and themes).

The studies in the literature review highlighted linguistic, organizational, and affective issues concerning ESL learners. An adaptation of Pratt's (1998) General Model of Teaching framed the literature review into the following five categories: (a) studies relating to the relationship between ESL learners and society stressed affective motives for ESL learners enrolling in postsecondary programs such as cultural integration, professional development, and socialization, (b) literature revolving around the relationship between ESL learners and the organizational context emphasized linguistic issues relating to language testing and organizational matters such as ESL curriculum and course content, (c) studies connected to the relationship between ESL learners and the content displayed linguistic issues such as second-language learning theories and affective issues of power dynamics between ESL speakers and native-English speakers, (d) studies pertaining to the relationship between ESL learners and the teacher highlighted affective matters such as the role of the teacher in the student-teacher relationship and power differences, and (e) literature that emphasized the relationship between the teacher and the content discussed organizational issues such as teacher training in ESL learner needs. The methodological implications of the literature review

provided the basis for my comprehensive inquiry, where the above categories of relationships were explored in the context of the experiences of administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs of one southern Ontario college.

I used a generic qualitative, descriptive, multimethod approach (Creswell, 2005, Merriam, 1998; Trochim, 2001). The constructivist perspective influenced the methodology used in this inquiry, as the study pooled the multiple perspectives of administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners to construct an understanding of issues concerning ESL learners' communication needs in the two programs. I collected data from 11 participants, all of whom were female. I conducted seven one hour, individual, semistructured (Fontana & Frey, 2000) interviews with 4 administrators (the past and current associate deans and the program co-ordinators of the two programs). I chose the administrator participants based on their role in administration. I used convenience sampling (Creswell, 2005; Trochim, 2001; Warren, 2002) to recruit 3 faculty members (one faculty member from each of the programs and one from the college's English for Academic Purposes program). With the help of the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician faculty members, I recruited 4 ESL student participants from the two programs. I conducted two separate one hour, semistructured interviews with two ESL learners from the Pharmacy Technician program and one one hour focus group session with 2 ESL students from the Practical Nursing program. I analyzed tape recordings, transcripts, and field notes of the individual interviews and the focus group session using a thematic approach (Charmaz, 2006). Methods such as triangulation and an inquiry audit ensured that the inquiry is valid and credible.

The analysis of transcribed individual interviews and a focus group session revealed six major themes and several subthemes (see Table 3). Even though the three stakeholder groups interviewed for this study all touched on the major themes, they each brought their personal views of the themes as experienced by their roles as administrator, educator, or student and, therefore, their specific association with the college programs.

There were six major findings. First, the study found that, according to participants, there is a direct link between ESL learners' communicative competency and ESL learners' opportunities for employment in Canada, for further studies in nursing or pharmacy, for integration into Canadian life, and for personal gratification. The data revealed that only one administrator and one faculty member who were interviewed touched on the notion of opportunities for ESL learners, which could represent the administrators' and faculty members' limited view of potential opportunities for ESL graduates. On the other hand, the ESL learners who were interviewed viewed opportunity in terms of the potential application of the knowledge and skills gained, such as integration into this country and employment, as a result of completing either program. Personal gratification in successfully completing either program was also emphasized by the ESL learners who were interviewed.

Second, ESL student characteristics in terms of their approaches to learning and social roles define the communication needs of ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs (see Appendix C, Question #1). Even though most administrators interviewed offered their perceptions of ESL learners in terms of their strong cognitive abilities, perseverance, enduring work ethic, and dedication to family, there may be a negative bias towards these learners because of their weak communication

skills. Faculty members who were interviewed also expressed positive characteristics of ESL learners such as strong work ethic, eagerness to learn, and their science background, but the faculty members' comments also suggest that the learners' weak communication skills magnified by their approaches to learning and cultural roles deter them from learning to the level necessary to become a successful and competent practical nurse or pharmacy technician. ESL learners, on the other hand, described how they balance the demands of college and family. The data from the ESL learners suggest that approaches to learning, such as the additional time required to learn and to complete assignments, their tendency to work with their cultural peers, and their preference to work alone on marked assignments, could possibly be coping mechanisms because of their weak communication skills. The ESL learners who were interviewed also suggested that without their family support systems, their parent role would make studying at the college level extremely challenging.

Third, the analysis of the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician curricula's expectations placed on ESL learners uncovers a gap between the learners' existing communication skills and the necessary level required by the curricula. The administrators who were interviewed viewed curriculum expectations in terms of program standards and support systems. They suggested that all learners are evaluated against the same rigorous standards and that support systems are in place to assist ESL learners but that it is the responsibility of the learner to access these support mechanisms. The faculty members stressed that the expectation of strong communication skills reflects the same expectation in the nursing or pharmacy professions. Faculty members also emphasized that the programs' curricula expectations are not to blame for the ESL

learners' struggles, but rather that the programs' low acceptance standards are the larger issue in terms of ESL learners meeting the programs' expectations. On the other hand, the ESL learners who were interviewed stated that the fast-paced lab work, the specific vocabulary related to the programs, and the conflict between their preferred transmission learning style and the curricula's collaborative teaching strategies are the key challenges of their programs. Despite citing their struggles with English fluency, the ESL learners interviewed did not stress improved language competency as a solution and maintained that a strong work ethic would allow them to complete either program successfully. This finding suggests that ESL learners do not understand the significance of interpersonal communication in their future job placements.

Fourth, the participants listed numerous barriers that ESL learners face in terms of successful program completion and subsequent job placement. The administrators who were interviewed described the barriers that ESL learners face in the two programs. Understanding cultural and professional nuances, obtaining co-op placement, self-perception as an ESL learner, acknowledgment that they need help in communication skills, and passing professional certification exams were defined by administrators as some of the hurdles ESL learners face because of their weak communication skills. The data from the faculty members' interviews suggest that because of the ESL learners' weak communicative competency, these learners face barriers in learning, co-op placement, and assimilation into the Canadian health care professional culture. The ESL learners who were interviewed commented on the struggles they face when learning and described the pace of the instructors' speaking, the limited opportunities for and the type

of evaluation, and the large class sizes as impediments to their learning and to imparting their knowledge.

Fifth, participants from the three stakeholder groups all expressed concern regarding the college's reputation or their own professional reputation in relation to the ESL learners' communicative competency. Administrators articulated their frustration with trying to balance maintaining the programs' strong reputation, supporting policies that invite learners into programs, and producing competent graduates. Faculty members, on the other hand, emphasized the reputation of the ESL learner in the context of learning experiences in their courses and with other learners. Faculty members worry that the reputations of their ESL learners could be jeopardized because of their weak communication skills. The ESL learners who were interviewed also stressed their concern with their personal reputation in terms of their families' dependence on the completion of their studies and finding employment. ESL learners were also concerned with their professional reputation in terms of how their communication skills would affect their careers in nursing or pharmacy.

And sixth, all participants identified communication skills as a weakness for ESL learners in both programs, and each stakeholder group offered solutions to compensate this weakness. The administrators' suggestions for assisting ESL learners in the two programs ranged from increasing acceptance standards and pretesting to including mandatory support, a reevaluation of the communications course currently offered, and content-specific instruction for ESL learners. The faculty members' proposed solutions for assisting ESL learners came from both an organizational perspective, such as increased internal program standards and pretesting, and curricular and instructional

suggestions including an emphasis on communication skills, a content-specific communications course, and teaching strategies to accommodate ESL learners' listening and reading needs. Faculty members indicated that it was the responsibility of the college as an organization to provide ESL learners with the tools necessary to succeed. The students who were interviewed offered practical solutions for meeting their communication needs. They suggested a system of mandatory tutorials where ESL learners could go for assistance with content, assignments, and preparing for evaluations, a program-focused communications course that would be meaningful to their learning in the program, and access to content during off-semester when they could review key content before the term begins.

The results of this inquiry demonstrate the multiple perspectives of the three key stakeholder groups. The administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners who were interviewed provided rich descriptions of the experiences of ESL learners, but each perspective was linked to the specific role of the participant within the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs.

Discussion

Each participant in this inquiry brought her unique perspective of ESL learner communication needs. These perspectives are influenced by their experiences as program administrators, faculty members, or ESL learners in the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. Further, it can be argued that the participants' views are influenced by their personal, professional, or educational goals. This section will link the results of this study to previous studies discussed in Chapter Two.

The Relationship Between ESL Learners and Society

ESL students bring a wealth of experience and knowledge to the learning context, a trait that could be labeled as human capital. However, the participants in this study feel that ESL learners in the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs cannot exhibit their human capital because the rigorous curricula compounded by the ESL learners' weak communication skills do not assist them in demonstrating their previous knowledge and experiences. This finding supports Zhu's (2005) suggestion that Canadian immigrants' human capital, as a whole, is not recognized. In my study, despite their background knowledge in science or even with completed out-of-country credentials in, for example, pharmacy, ESL learners are still forced to enroll in further training in Canadian postsecondary college programs. In addition, my study also confirms Zhu's suggestion that learning for ESL students is significantly founded in the extrinsic motivation of gaining meaningful employment. As well, it is evident from my study that these two college programs accept ESL learners despite weak oral communication skills and the possible challenges and barriers they may face in completing the programs or in finding employment. The college appears to have an extrinsic motivation in accepting students in spite of weak communication skills.

On the other hand, the results of this study further highlight the professional, personal, and social opportunities perceived to be offered to ESL graduates upon successful completion of the college's Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs. While administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners in this study suggested that completion of either program is motivated by extrinsic factors such as prospects for professional success and integration into Canadian society, ESL learners

also implied intrinsic reasons, such as personal gratification. These findings parallel Duff et al.'s (2002) study on the perceptions of immigrant Canadian learners seeking careers as long-term resident care aides or home support workers. Duff et al.'s study highlighted that communicative competence is linked with cultural integration, professional development, and socialization. My study explored a broader spectrum of stakeholders and confirmed the above study's findings in that participants offered the possible opportunities and reasons for enrolling in the two programs in terms of the potential outcomes of graduating from the programs.

However, one concern that was expressed in my study is that many ESL learners lack the communicative competence to be successful in the programs, and therefore opportunities for professional success, integration, and personal fulfillment are greatly decreased. Faculty members further expressed frustration in not having access to tools to assist ESL learners. Misleading acceptance standards for ESL learners in the two programs coupled with minimal resources available to both staff and students to assist learners in improving their communicative competency to the level of ensuring success complement Basu's (2006) concern that lack of funding for quality and meaningful language instruction inhibits the integration of immigrants, thereby affecting these individuals' potential to contribute to Canadian society. With respect to my study, the inability to fully reach one's potential extends to some inability in successfully undertaking a profession in health care.

The Relationship Between ESL Learners and the Organizational Context

Increasing college acceptance standards and pretesting learners to assess their communication levels would, according to some administrators in this study, eliminate

any discrepancies between an applicant's communication abilities and the expected abilities to study at the college level. What still needs to be determined, however, is the level of increase in acceptance standards and a method of testing. With respect to language testing, Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari's (1999) quantitative study concluded that the TOEFL test is an inaccurate predictor of student academic success and integration into North American society. While their study compared university ESL student TOEFL scores with their grade point averages, my study interviewed individuals in the college setting. The results of my study indicated that increasing acceptance standards and pretesting ESL learners would provide accepted ESL learners with a more realistic opportunity to complete the Practical Nursing or the Pharmacy Technician programs and to succeed in the respective professions. However, Elson (1992) and Shohamy (2000) believe that testing for language proficiency does not assess the complexity of language use and is, therefore, too simplistic a tool to determine access to or success in higher education. Defining an appropriate testing instrument would then need to be considered or the use of a combination of strategies may be more appropriate.

The emphasis on increasing acceptance standards and pretesting apparent in the administrators' vision of possible solutions could be the administration's way of not taking ownership of ESL learners' needs, an explanation proposed by Elson (1992). A critical view of these possible solutions leads me to suggest that the administrators interviewed in my study are more concerned with eliminating ESL learners' needs rather than accommodating their communication and language needs in order for them to successfully complete either program.

On the other hand, some faculty members in this study suggested incorporating communication skills within the content of courses. Others proposed that ESL instruction needs to be separate from a program's core content. Recommendations from faculty members, such as mandatory support, presemesters, and content-specific ESL and communication courses, strongly indicate that they feel ESL learners in the two programs need extra support outside of the context of the programs' curricula. These two categories of proposed solutions clearly indicate two conflicting views on how to assist college ESL learners and reflect Melles et al., (2005) description of the tension between those who view ESL as strictly language instruction and those who believe ESL instruction can enhance discipline-specific learning in postsecondary education. If not resolved, this tension then could highlight probable barriers in implementing either or both of these categories of solutions successfully.

My study's results clearly show that faculty members feel that ESL students' weak communicative competency often prevents them from truly sharing ideas and experiences as part of the learning process. Further, my study concluded that the participants in the study feel that the ESL and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) programs as they stand at present are not effective in preparing ESL learners to communicate effectively within the two college programs. This finding parallels Zhu's (2005) discovery that LINC programs, which are in place to assist and prepare immigrants for integration, are not effective in maximizing an individual's human capital in either college or professional sectors. My study in addition found that some ESL learners do not view themselves as needing further English language instruction, a finding that also echoes Zhu's conclusion that the level of difficulty and appropriateness

of the LINC program does not suit immigrants' needs, the opinion being that ESL programs are only for those in need of the most basic English language instruction. From the ESL learners' perspective, why would they need further language instruction if they have already been accepted into the programs? There could be a perception that the need for language instruction is indicative of an individual who does not have the potential or skills to complete a postsecondary education. However, it is apparent from the administrators' and faculty members' perspective that ESL learners in the two programs need to develop their language skills.

The organizational culture of the college encourages the use of an interactive and experiential approach to teaching. Teaching methods and strategies used within this southern Ontario college context decidedly reflect the North American culture that it primarily serves. In fact, some faculty members observed a cultural disconnect between the college's expected interactive methods and intensity of engagement in course work and the ESL learners' cultural understanding of engaged learning. First, some faculty members and ESL learners suggested that ESL learners do not engage in learning within the classroom because they fear negative judgment of their communication skills. This divide in terms of perceived engagement, however, could simply be a matter of the differences in preferred teaching and learning styles, the focus of Song's (2006) study. Western education includes open discussion and communication of ideas and opinions, a practice that may not be acceptable in non-Western cultures. In order to fully understand ESL learners' engagement in learning, do postsecondary organizations need to reassess how they view and evaluate ESL learners' engagement?

Power differences between faculty members and learners may constitute a barrier to finding solutions in accommodating ESL learners' needs. Furthermore, the voice of the mainstream White culture embodied in the college hierarchy (administrators and faculty members) is in contrast with the voice of minority immigrant learners. A possible solution would be to develop courses specifically designed for ESL learners that would apply their preferred teaching methods and respond to their preferred learning styles.

The Relationship Between ESL Learners and the Content

Two major themes emerging from my study are communication expectations placed on ESL learners and barriers to successful program completion and job placement. ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs are expected to demonstrate deep learning in order to be successful in both the program and in their job placement, but administrators and faculty members feel that their language competency prevents them from doing so. A proposed solution offered in my study is to provide ESL learners with contextualized curriculum focusing on communication skills, which would benefit all learners in the programs, not just ESL students. And, if ESL learners are more confident in their language abilities, as a consequence, they will likely demonstrate deep learning. A contextualized communication course would assist ESL learners with their language problems while also providing some basic content relevant to practical nursing or pharmacy. This type of solution would bypass the college's, faculty members', and ESL learners' possible negative perceptions associated with ESL instruction, described by Melles et al. (2005), as it will simultaneously assist learners in improving their communication skills while advancing their knowledge and skills in either of these two professions.

The Relationship Between ESL Learners and the Teacher

In interviewing faculty members and ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs, I explored the relationship between the two stakeholder groups. The study revealed a conflict that could be associated with how different cultures view authority figures. For instance, the study found that support systems such as tutoring services and one-on-one support from instructors is available for ESL learners in the two programs, but participants strongly emphasized that it was up to the learners to initiate access to these resources. However, perceived power differences between faculty members and students, cultural perspectives on authority figures, and large class sizes all inhibit ESL learners from approaching their instructors for assistance and guidance. This finding ties in with studies which explored the relationship between language level and gate-keeping (Song, 2006; Mitchell & Myles, 1998; Bremer, Broeder, Roberts, Simonot, & Vasseur, 1993, cited in Mitchell & Myles). My study brings forth the idea that when the college encourages self-direction through the expectation that ESL learners will access support systems, it assumes that the learners will have both the confidence and the communication skills to manage themselves throughout the support process. The system can work to the learners' advantage only if faculty members and tutors are each aware of the power dynamics inherent in the sensitive relationships between those who speak English and those who have English as their second language.

The Relationship Between Teachers and the Content

Many learners accepted into the programs have a false sense of confidence in their language abilities, yet the ESL learners' level of success is largely associated with their communicative competence. Faculty members voiced concern with the lack of tools

available to them to assist ESL learners. The proposed solutions brought forth in my study did not include providing training for instructors in assisting the ESL learners in their programs. However, as Meskill's (2005) study suggests, teacher training in supporting ESL learners' communication needs is imperative in providing meaningful and learner-centered postsecondary education.

In summary, the findings of this study highlighted the relationships between elements in the teaching/learning context that had been apparent in the research examined in the literature review. This study touched on the relationship between the ESL learners and society and brought to light motivation for learning and immigrant integration. The study also revealed the relationship between the ESL learners and the organizational context which addressed admission policies and procedures as well as curricular innovations. The relationship between the ESL learners and the content brought forth in this study pertained to program expectations. In exploring the relationship between the ESL learners and the teacher, this study's findings point to power dynamics and cultural interpretations of authority figures. Further, the relationship between the teacher and the content was emphasized in this study and leads me to conclude that teacher training in assisting ESL learners is imperative.

Implications

Implications of this inquiry point to practical measures in accommodating the communication needs of ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs (see Appendix C, Questions #3 and #4). These practical measures include (a) organizational interventions related to policies and procedures, (b) curriculum accommodations, including discipline-specific language support and revised ESL and

English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curricula, and (c) instructional accommodations that enhance the teacher-student relationship. Furthermore, the findings suggest implications for theory such as exploring the characteristics of adult ESL learners, including the voice of college ESL learners, and investigating the forces that work in favour of or against meeting the communication needs of college ESL learners (see Figure 3).

Implications for Practice

Four practical implications emerged from this study. First, as indicated by some participants, admission policies and procedures need to be revised so that the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs present prospective learners with realistic expectations and inclusive opportunities to access education. As Bos (2001) states, “one of the most important and difficult issues in adult education is the admission of adult students who are dealing with self-esteem issues or who do not have a realistic idea of their goals, aptitudes and academic functioning skills” (p. 181). Moreover, a college’s admission practices are an indication of its values and beliefs (Bos). In the past, the college in which this study was conducted used pretesting as an admission procedure to determine access into the two programs, and as indicated by participants, the return of such a practice could help in determining the aptitude of the prospective student. However, the results indicate that pretesting would not address the specific language needs of ESL applicants (see Figure 3). The college has since shifted from a learner-centered viewpoint, which emphasizes the learners’ characteristics, abilities, and needs, to a learning-centered philosophy, which highlights the notion of active student learning.

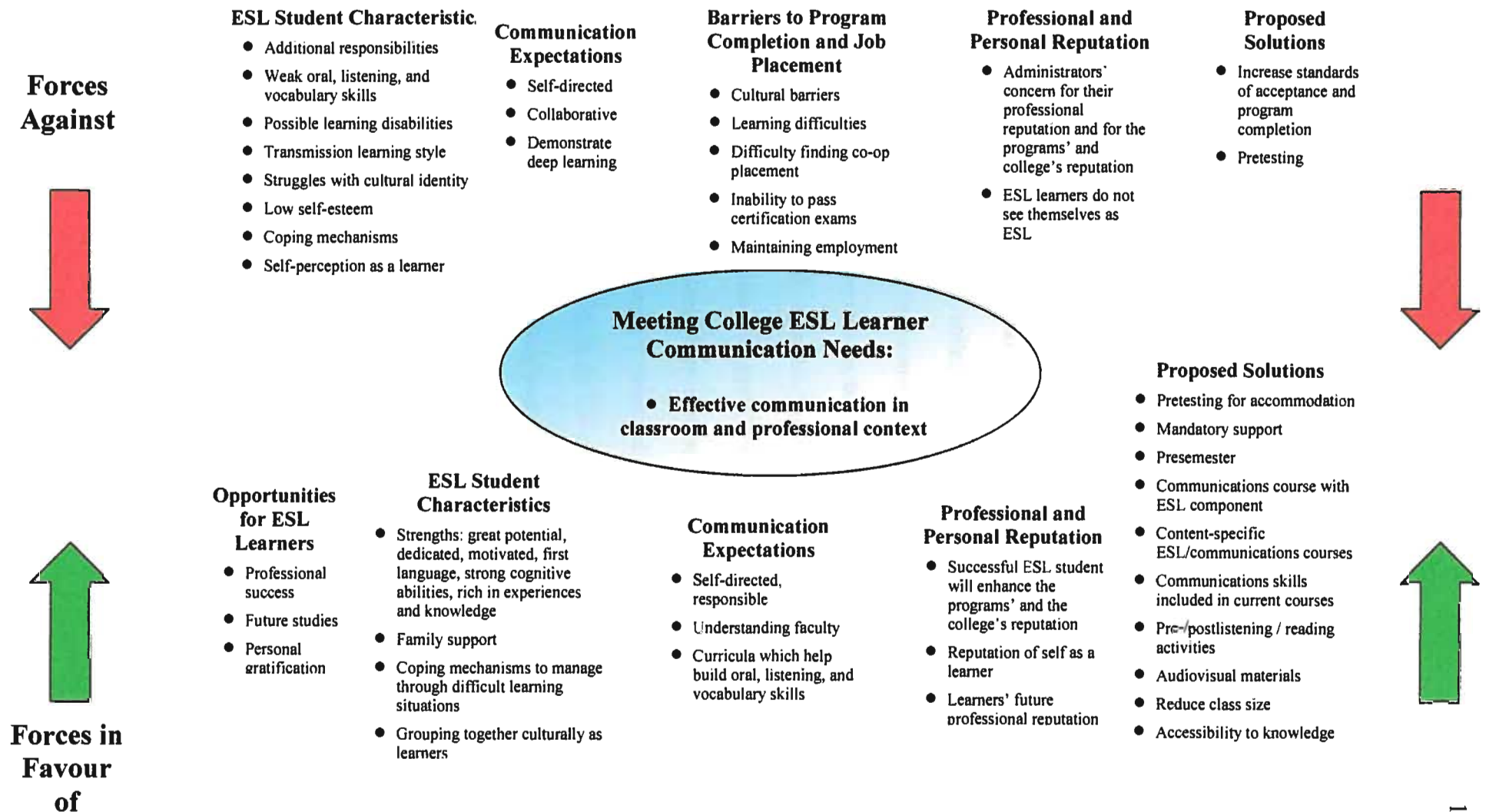


Figure 3. The forces working against and in favour of meeting college ESL learner communication needs.

The learning-centered philosophy is the driving force behind the design, implementation, and evaluation of learning. This shift in focus also reinforces the college's belief that all individuals should have access to learning. However, through the application of this philosophy, the college has inadvertently taken away a process of understanding ESL applicants' specific needs and of developing plans to accommodate these specific needs upon admission to their programs (Benick, Newby, & Samuel, 1996). The ESL applicants' needs then are now secondary. In considering each applicant's specific needs, the college would provide ESL college applicants with a realistic sense of what is expected of them in terms of their communicative competence.

An implication for the college, then, is perhaps to consider an approach such as prior learning assessment (PLA) to determine a learner's communicative competence in advance of program acceptance. Sargent (1999) defines PLA as "an assessment process and a variety of tools that assist adults in reflecting upon, articulating, and demonstrating learning for the purpose of having it measured, compared to some standard, and in some way acknowledged by a crediting body" (as cited in Peruniak & Powell, 2006, p. 318). Although costly in terms of assessing each ESL applicant through individual interviews, PLA could provide both the college and the ESL applicant with the information they would need for the learner to evaluate whether the programs are suitable for him or her, and, if appropriate, for the college to ensure that it has the support systems in place to assist the learner. PLA is already a part of the college system. Therefore, the recommended change to the current system would be to redirect ESL applicants to the PLA office at the college.

As stated previously, an admittance process that may rule out certain ESL learners for weak communicative competency goes against the college's central philosophy of access to all. Why not then consider pretesting as part of the PLA process and as a means of determining ESL applicants' specific language needs (see Figure 3). Through pretesting, the college can have an idea of the support systems that it must put into place. By shifting the focus of pretesting away from determining access to learning and turning it into an instrument to determine accommodation, the college would not only provide learners with access to education but also offer them a more practical means of successfully completing either program.

However, pretesting with the intention of providing support systems for the successful completion of either program leads to the question of whether or not this practice could be considered accommodation or segregation. One proposed solution emerging from this study and that is apparent in the themes identified by all categories of stakeholders is to create an ESL stream for a current mandatory English communications course. If one were to look at the spectrum of ESL student needs (see Appendix C, Question #1), it is apparent that most ESL learners in the two programs need not only further language instruction but also content or discipline-specific language training. Therefore, if the college were to segregate ESL learners for the purpose of accommodating their communication needs, it must consider methodologies which advance not only the students' communication skills but also their knowledge and skills related to their future profession so that the emphasis would be placed on assisting ESL learners and not on segregating them into courses for ESL instruction only.

Second, the study found that there is little or no feedback about the success rates of ESL graduates from the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs in their respective professions. This gap highlights a major issue concerning the college's program evaluation practices. At present, a program evaluation committee, consisting of representatives from the public and private sectors including employers, professional and trade organizations, and college representatives (administration, faculty, and students), meets twice during the academic year. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss policies and procedures related to new programs and curriculum and to provide feedback on the effectiveness and competence of graduates. However, this process is quite general and does not specifically consider ESL graduates.

What is missing from the committee is an ESL alumni voice. With a high percentage of learners in the two programs having English as their second language, one or more ESL student graduate representatives would provide insightful information about the opportunities and barriers they face as a result of their communicative competency. This type of insight would provide valuable feedback to the college in terms of assessing its accommodation practices to assist its ESL learners and, where necessary, to determine alternative practices which address their specific communication needs. Chesler, Lewis, and Crowfoot (2005) suggest that program evaluation committees must include the administrator, faculty, student, staff, and alumni voices through a combination of individual surveys and interviews, group interviews, and organizational data such as observations as additional means of hearing the ESL learners' voices. Other organizational data could include information on success rates in certification exams and employment for ESL learners who graduate from the programs. The overall goal of such

evaluation practices would be to include those involved with the programs, specifically the ESL learner voice, by employing multiple means of obtaining feedback which could perhaps minimize or even eliminate hidden agendas because all viewpoints would be aired and be explicit.

Third, directly linked to program evaluation is the college's reputation within educational and professional communities. And tied with the college's reputation is the development of articulation agreements with universities. Articulation agreements as indicated by this study are a major focus of the college. These agreements have the opportunity to create a win-win situation for all those involved: the college, the students, and the university. According to Bos (2001):

Articulation arrangements between colleges and universities are of significant benefit and interest to adult learners in that they provide access to degree education concurrent with training in the practical applications for which colleges are renowned...targeted college programs may be articulated with a particular university program resulting in block recognition for skills and knowledge achieved. (p. 184)

While articulation agreements provide learners with access to university degrees, they also provide the incentive for increased numbers of prospective learners, such as ESL learners, to apply to college programs with the intention of moving on to complete their studies at the university level. What this means for the college is increased enrollment and, therefore, as indicated in Chapter One, increased government funding. Articulation agreements, however, are also reliant on the college's reputation in providing high-standard programs. The graduates of the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy

Technician programs are, as one participant indicated, the product of the programs and the college itself and, therefore, directly linked to its professional reputation. If the product is faulty, then universities will assume that the college does not provide quality candidates and is thus less attractive as a partner for an articulation agreement. A better quality preparatory program for ESL learners would ensure that ESL learners are fully prepared to meet the academic standards of the programs and would thus demonstrate that the college is responsive to its learners' needs while also maintaining its academic integrity.

Fourth, pedagogical implications in terms of curricular innovation, the teacher-student relationship, and diversity training emerge from this study. Results indicate that a complete restructuring of the programs' curricula is not necessary; however, how ESL learners are taught could change to better accommodate their communication needs. For example, the findings suggest common solutions across all themes:

1. redeveloping a current mandatory communications course by adding an ESL component and an emphasis on professional vocabulary and content;
2. offering a presemester to ESL learners as a way of developing their language skills while also being content focused;
3. emphasizing discipline-specific ESL courses, such as ESL courses for nursing and pharmacy;
4. providing ESL learners accessibility to knowledge through preterm access to reading lists, PowerPoint slides, or other on-line materials;

5. including mandatory support in the form of extra courses which would assist ESL learners with content, language needs, and guidance on completing assignments.

It is interesting to note that the solution to redevelop a current mandatory communications course by adding an ESL component was a common subtheme in all stakeholder groups. This recommendation is the most likely to be implemented by the college. Nevertheless, all of these proposed solutions emphasize discipline-specific content with extended language support and, therefore, provide suggestions for curricular change without an overhaul to the current content stressed in the programs' curricula.

However, the results of this study indicate that solutions could begin in refocusing the English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum to include an emphasis on building ESL learners' discipline-specific communication skills while encouraging collaborative learning. The revised EAP curriculum could help ESL learners identify possible learning disabilities and guide them towards the appropriate support systems. Also, as part of the EAP curriculum, the learners could understand how their cultural identity affects their learning and learn to recognize the coping mechanisms they use when in difficult learning situations. Overall, the EAP curriculum would prepare ESL learners to learn within a specific discipline while encouraging an awareness of themselves as learners in a new cultural context. This new awareness could lead to enhancing the students' sociolinguistic competency (see Figure 4).

Although reducing class sizes is essentially an organizational intervention, it could also serve to enhance the faculty member-ESL learner relationship. Reduced class

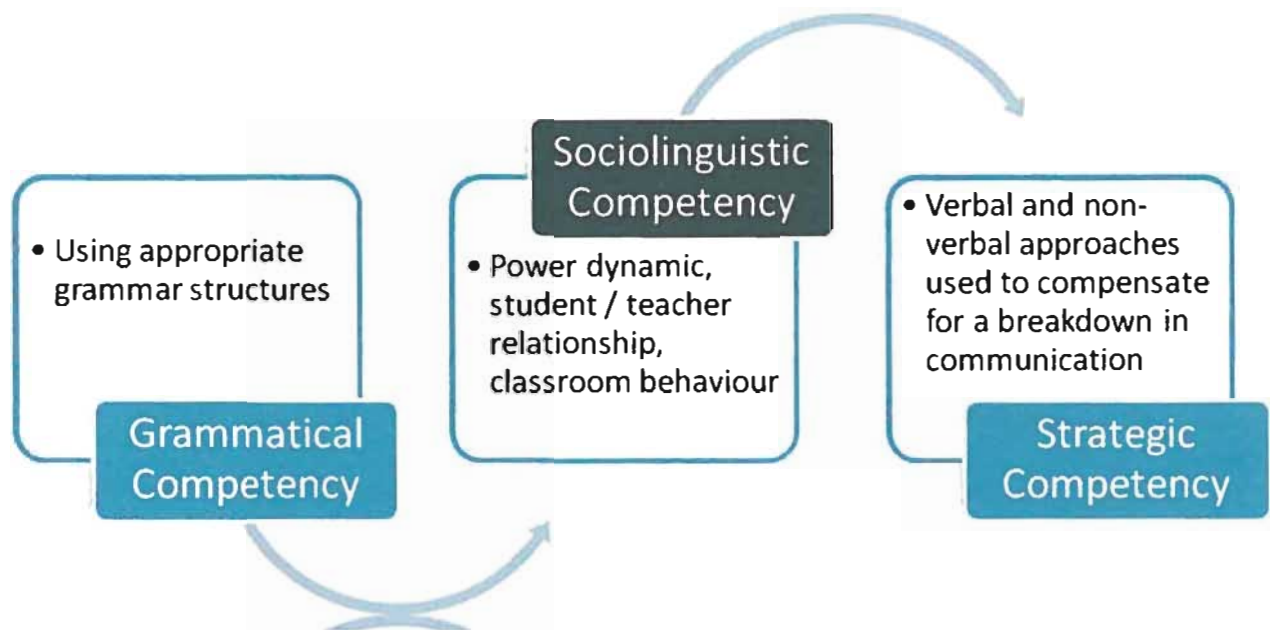


Figure 4. Enhancing college ESL learners' sociolinguistic competency.

sizes could affect the teaching strategies and assessment practices by creating an environment conducive to the introduction of a variety of methods that would take ESL learners' needs into consideration. Incorporating audiovisual materials and pre- and postlistening or reading activities could strengthen ESL learners' oral, listening, and vocabulary skills and thus could positively affect ESL learners' self-esteem (see Figure 4).

Further, there is a strong sense of frustration in some participants from the administrator and faculty member groups who view most ESL learners' abilities as deficient. If the college were to revert to a learner-centered philosophy, these views could potentially change. According to Huba and Freed (2000), shifting to a learner-centered philosophy means that through dialogue, the diversity of both teachers and students is respected. Bringing together faculty members and ESL students through intergroup dialogue (Chesler et al., 2005) could increase awareness and understanding of one another and, as a result, could lead to increased understanding of ESL learners' specific language needs, thereby reducing the learners' fears of approaching authority figures (see Figure 4). In addition, role models and diversity within the college's administrative and faculty member positions would provide learners with a sense of community and belonging. Last, the study's limited results in instructional strategies for accommodating ESL learners is a strong indication that the college's professional development program for faculty needs to include a training component which emphasizes teaching and evaluation strategies that specifically accommodate identified ESL learner communication needs.

Overall, the results of this study indicate several practical measures to help take into account and accommodate ESL learners' communication needs. From an organizational perspective, admission policies and procedures could consider ESL learners' specific language needs, and program evaluation could include the ESL learners' voice. These measures could minimize the challenge of balancing the college's reputation amongst postsecondary institutions while providing inclusive and realistic learning opportunities for ESL learners. As well, curricular implications for the ESL and EAP programs would include an emphasis on discipline-specific content with extended language support. Pedagogical implications in accommodating ESL learners' language needs would enhance the student-teacher relationship.

Implications for Theory

From a macroperspective, the results of this inquiry connect with several theories related to postsecondary education. First, the results add to the pool of knowledge related to adult learners, specifically with an emphasis on adult ESL learners. My study presents ideas about motivational, social, and human capital factors. In particular the opportunities for ESL learners as a result of completing either the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs suggest that ESL learners in the two programs are motivated to learn in order to assimilate into Canadian professional life. As a result of this assimilation, ESL graduates can then better offer their social and human capital, in the form of citizenship and wealth of experiences, to their community.

Second, the results of this inquiry point to the significance of including a variety of voices in educational research. Including the administrator, faculty member, and in particular the ESL student voice was imperative in constructing an understanding of the

issues ESL college learners face. Examining the results of this study from the critical perspective, it is apparent that the participants' multiple perspectives provide a balanced understanding of the phenomenon under study. When administrators and faculty members emphasized the weaknesses of ESL learners, the learners provided an explanation for their behaviour. For instance, when administrators and faculty members suggested that ESL learners do not take the in-school opportunity to practice their English communication skills and possibly group together to sustain their cultural identity, the learners explained that they group together culturally as a means of supporting one another. This study provided layers of understanding in the multiple perspectives of its participants.

Third, from a critical perspective, this study uncovered a variety of forces, both positive and negative, that have an effect on meeting the communication needs of college ESL learners (see Figure 3). The focus of the study, determining how can the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician college programs most effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs, assumes that college ESL learners need assistance. From the data emerged the negative ESL learner characteristics, such as additional responsibilities, weak oral, listening, and vocabulary skills, possible learning disabilities, transmission learning style, struggles with cultural identity, low self-esteem, coping mechanisms, and their self-perception as an ESL learner, which may deter ESL learners' success in the programs. However, all three stakeholders revealed that ESL learners have many positive traits such as their great potential, dedication, motivation, their first language, strong cognitive abilities, and wealth of experiences. The emergence of a positive view of ESL learners was a significant learning moment for me as a researcher,

because when I began this research, I was working under the assumption that ESL learners need assistance because of their weak communicative competence. What I learned during this process is that their strong work ethic, determination, and rich experiences are qualities that positively affect their learning in postsecondary environments, but that these strengths may not be overtly evident because of other factors which belie their existence.

Fourth, communication expectations placed on ESL learners is another major theme emerging from the study that can be viewed as both a positive and negative influence on meeting these learners' communication needs (see Figure 3). As stated in Chapter Four, the programs' curricula expect all learners to be self-directed in terms of accessing support systems, to work collaboratively with other learners, and to demonstrate their knowledge during evaluations. These expectations can be problematic in meeting the communication needs of ESL learners because these learners prefer to work within their cultural group or individually and they find the frequency and type of evaluation problematic. On the other hand, the curricula also demand self-direction and responsibility in terms of time management, characteristics which according to the administrators and faculty members who were interviewed are apparent in ESL learners. Faculty members who are understanding and curricula which help build oral, listening, and vocabulary skills could also work in favour of meeting the communication needs of the ESL learners in the two programs.

Fifth, personal and professional reputation is an emergent theme that had not appeared in the research examined for the literature review. This theme highlights the forces that can work in favour of or against meeting the communication needs of ESL

learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs (see Figure 3). The administrators who were interviewed are concerned with their professional reputation and the programs' reputation amongst postsecondary institutions. While the administrators' preoccupation with reputation could work against accommodating ESL learners' communication needs, successful ESL graduates with effective communication skills could enhance the programs' and the college's reputation. Similarly, while the ESL learners who were interviewed did not label themselves as ESL learners, the faculty members' interest in the ESL learners' reputation amongst other learners could be beneficial to ESL learners' communication skills in that faculty members are cognizant of the advantages of a positive learning environment and its effects on the learners' confidence in their abilities to practice in the nursing or pharmacy professions. It is interesting to note that in one way or another, all stakeholder groups discussed personal reputation. As mentioned above, this preoccupation with reputation could lead to understanding the stakeholders' concerns regarding ESL learners' communication needs.

Sixth, as discussed previously in this chapter, the proposed solutions voiced by the participants could be viewed as forces working in favour of or against accommodating college ESL learners in the two programs (see Figure 3). Increasing standards of acceptance or program completion and pretesting for admittance into the programs excludes learners and goes against the concept of accommodating language needs. However, pretesting ESL applicants as a means of determining language needs and accommodation practices would assist the college in meeting these learners' communication needs. Moreover, once accepted into the programs, ESL learners' communication skills would benefit from organizational interventions, curricular

innovations, and instructional strategies discussed in the Implications for Practice section of this chapter.

Seventh, all stakeholder groups mentioned professional success as a potential opportunity for ESL graduates of the Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs. Scott (1998) suggests that the “aim of education is to transform society through political action by educating its members to a new vision Student empowerment, therefore, will depend upon negotiating, not avoiding, the power dynamics” (p. 103). If college administrators and faculty members seek to understand how to accommodate college ESL learners’ communication needs so as to help them realize the opportunities provided by the successful completion of either program, then the issue of power must be examined. ESL learners have some power over their learning, but it is apparent through the results of this study that the college has the power to consider and implement the study’s recommended organizational, curricular, and instructional interventions.

Limitations

The purpose of this inquiry was to explore, understand, and describe how the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician college programs can most effectively accommodate ESL learners’ communication needs. It explored the perceptions of administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners involved in the two programs. However, the inquiry was limited to investigating the communication needs of ESL learners only in the two college programs. The data were collected from only three stakeholder groups. Of the 11 participants, 2 were known to me and could have influenced, in either a positive or a negative way, the data that were elicited. Furthermore,

the data were collected during midterm when students, faculty members, and administrators were under a great deal of strain. These limitations could be addressed in future research. Nevertheless, an inquiry audit confirmed that the themes which emerged from my coding process were consistent with the participants' voices.

Suggestions for Future Research

From an organizational perspective, there are several areas which could further be explored. This study found that there were no statistics or means of gathering statistics on the success rates of ESL graduates from the two programs. Some questions which emerged are: (a) What percentage of ESL graduates successfully complete the Practical Nursing National Certification Exam, (b) What is the quality of job opportunities for ESL graduates of the two programs, and (c) Are competent English communication skills relevant if ESL graduates of the two programs find employment in their home country or within their cultural community in Canada? Exploring the above questions through a quantitative study which tracks ESL graduates from either program would lead to added clarification of the challenges ESL learners face in the two programs and could guide further recommendations for accommodating their communication needs. Moreover, exploring questions of accessibility of opportunities could also be transferred to other disciplines within postsecondary learning institutions, and, more important, could assist ESL learners in accessing and utilizing their human capital.

For future research, this inquiry's approach could be applied to exploring ESL learners' needs in other college programs as well as to comparing ESL learner communication needs in college and university programs. Future research could focus solely on one stakeholder group's perceptions, as it could focus on those involved in ESL

or English for Academic Purposes programs either at the college level or at adult learning centers. In addition, a proposed solution raised in this study could be measured in a quantitative study to determine effective implementation policies and procedures.

Other studies could be done to investigate effective faculty member training required in assisting instructors to address the communication needs of college ESL learners in Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs. Issues related to organizational policies and procedures regarding faculty training could be an area of investigation in such a study.

The faculty members who were interviewed indicated that communication skills could be further developed, not just in ESL learners in the programs but in all learners. A qualitative study which explores the communication needs of all learners in the college's Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs would assist the college in determining effective curricular innovation which would benefit all future learners and employers of these learners.

Most important, a study which explores the positive characteristics and influences of ESL learners in other learning contexts would contribute significantly to the overall understanding of who adult ESL learners are and what they bring to the teaching and learning experience. Another qualitative study exploring ESL learners' approaches to learning and social roles would provide the cultural understanding necessary for effective college teacher training as a means of accommodating these learners.

Conclusion

By bringing together the perceptions of program administrators, faculty members, and ESL learners involved in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician college

programs, this study illuminated stakeholders' hopes and fears, pride and disappointment, and compassion and frustrations. The myriad of emotions suggests that perceptions, beliefs, and values are all intertwined. As educators, we must assess what we perceive in the classroom, in educational organizations, and most important in our communities. Immigrant Canadians must be given fair opportunities to realize their educational goals while demonstrating competency in both their academic and professional pursuits. Our postsecondary schools need to provide relevant and timely support in a way that balances societal and academic expectations while still maintaining a respected reputation amongst their colleagues. Together, clear expectations, high course standards, open discussion, needs-specific training, and ongoing, consistent evaluation may address many of the incongruencies, weaknesses, and misperceptions existent in the current programs.

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Appendix A

Interview Guides

Interview Guide- Administrator

Masters Thesis Title: Perceptions, Policies, and Practices: Accommodating College ESL Learner Communication Needs

Participant Group: Administrator / Program Coordinator

Time:

Date:

Place:

Part 1: Script:

So to review why I'm here, the purpose of this study is to explore, understand, and determine the communication needs of college ESL learners. The focal research question is: How can the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs most effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs?

A possible benefit of your participation is a reflection on the needs of college ESL learners. Openly discussing this topic will help in addressing the communication skills needed by college ESL learners.

You have a copy of the Informed Consent form. Do you have any questions about the study?

Could you please sign both copies of the consent form? One copy is for your records (I will have two copies with me).

Thank you.

I'm going to audio-tape record the interview and take notes as you're talking.

May I start recording? Let me now test the tape recorder.

Part 2: Questions

Opening question:

- Please tell me about your work at the college in relation to ESL learners.

Introductory Question:

- Could you please describe the standards for ESL learners accepted into the Practical Nursing / Pharmacy Technician programs? Clarification of question: Standards in terms of communication competency.

Key Questions:

1. Please describe what you think are the communication needs of ESL learners.

2. Please describe how the students are accepted into the programs. Tell me about the placement process.
3. Do you feel the placement process is effective? Why or why not?
4. How might the placement process be changed to assist ESL learners?
5. What percentage of ESL learners are successful in completing the programs?
Probe: How many find employment in the profession?
6. Please describe what you think of the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician program curricula. Do you feel they meet the communication needs of ESL learners?
7. How might the curricula better accommodate the communication needs of ESL learners in the programs?
8. Please describe what you are proud of in these programs in relation to ESL learners' communication needs.
9. What are some of your concerns regarding ESL learners in these programs?
10. Please give a few examples of the type of feedback ESL students in these programs have provided. Probe: Feedback on content, language level, teaching and evaluation strategies.
11. What do you feel might be some practical measures in accommodating the communication needs of ESL learners in these programs? Probe: What do you think are some barriers to accommodating ESL learners in these programs?

Ending Question:

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Part 3: Script

Thank you for your participation and insights. I will be e-mailing you the transcript soon. This is to give you the opportunity to review your comments and make any changes, additions or clarifications. If you could e-mail your comments within a couple of weeks that would be helpful. Once again, I will ensure your confidentiality by using pseudonyms in the transcripts. I will also keep all data locked in my home office and will erase the tape, shred the transcript, and delete the electronic files within two years from now.

The final thesis report will be available through Brock University's Instructional Resource Center and at Gibson Library.

I would also like to present my study's results at a college conference or workshop.

Thanks again, and I'll be in touch.

Interview Guide- Faculty

Masters Thesis Title: Perceptions, Policies, and Practices: Accommodating College ESL Learner Communication Needs

Participant Group: Faculty

Time:

Date:

Place:

Part 1: Script:

So to review why I'm here, the purpose of this study is to explore, understand, and determine the communication needs of college ESL learners. The focal research question is: How can the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs most effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs?

A possible benefit of your participation is a reflection on the needs of college ESL learners. Openly discussing this topic will help in addressing the communication skills needed by college ESL learners.

You have a copy of the Informed Consent form. Do you have any questions about the study?

Could you please sign both copies of the consent form? One copy is for your records (I will have two copies with me).

Thank you.

I'm going to audio-tape record the interview and take notes as you're talking.

May I start recording? Let me now test the tape recorder.

Part 2: Questions

Opening question:

- Please tell me about your work at the college in relation to ESL learners.

Introductory Question:

- Could you please describe the standards for ESL learners accepted into the Practical Nursing / Pharmacy Technician programs? Clarification of question: Standards in terms of communication competency.

Key Questions:

1. Please describe what you think are the communication needs of ESL learners.
2. What percentage of ESL learners are successful in completing the programs?

Probe: How many find employment in the profession?

3. What are some of your concerns regarding ESL learners in these programs?

4. Do you feel the placement process is effective? Why or why not?
5. Please describe what you feel are some of the strengths and weaknesses of ESL learners in (insert program name). Probe: Describe the learning styles of ESL learners in the program.
6. Is the program curriculum meeting the communication needs of ESL learners? Why or why not?
7. Please tell me what you and other faculty members have found works and does not work with ESL learners in the program.
8. Please give a few examples of the type of feedback ESL students have provided. Probe: Feedback on content, language level, teaching and evaluation strategies.
9. How might the curriculum better accommodate ESL learners in the programs?
10. What do you feel might be some practical measures in accommodating ESL learners in these programs? Probe: What do you think are some barriers to accommodating ESL learners in these programs?

Ending Question:

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Part 3: Script

Thank you for your participation and insights. I will be e-mailing you the transcript soon. This is to give you the opportunity to review your comments and make any changes, additions or clarifications. If you could e-mail your comments to me within a couple of weeks that would be helpful. Once again, I will ensure your confidentiality by using pseudonyms in the transcripts. I will also keep all data locked in my home office and will erase the tape, shred the transcript, and delete the electronic files within two years from now.

The final thesis report will be available through Brock University's Instructional Resource Center and at Gibson Library.

I would also like to present my study's results at a college conference or workshop.

Thanks again, and I'll be in touch.

Interview Guide- Faculty (English for Academic Purposes)

Masters Thesis Title: Perceptions, Policies, and Practices: Accommodating College ESL Learner Communication Needs

Participant Group: Faculty (English for Academic Purposes)

Time:

Date:

Place:

Part 1: Script:

So to review why I'm here, the purpose of this study is to explore, understand, and determine the communication needs of college ESL learners. The focal research question is: How can the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs most effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs?

A possible benefit of your participation is a reflection on the needs of college ESL learners. Openly discussing this topic will help in addressing the communication skills needed by college ESL learners.

You have a copy of the Informed Consent form. Do you have any questions about the study?

Could you please sign both copies of the consent form? One copy is for your records (I will have two copies with me).

Thank you. I'm going to audio-tape record the interview and take notes as you're talking. May I start recording? Let me now test the tape recorder.

Part 2: Questions

Opening question:

- Please tell me about your work at the college in relation to ESL learners.

Introductory Question:

- Could you please describe the standards for ESL learners accepted into the Practical Nursing / Pharmacy Technician programs? Clarification of question: Standards in terms of communication competency.

Key Questions:

1. Please describe what you think are the communication needs of ESL learners.
2. What percentage of ESL learners are accepted into the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs?
3. What are some of your concerns regarding ESL learners in these programs?
4. Do you feel the placement process is effective? Why or why not?

5. Please describe what you feel are some of the strengths and weaknesses of ESL learners. Probe: Describe the learning styles of ESL learners.
6. Is the preparatory program curriculum meeting the communication needs of ESL learners? Why or why not?
7. Please tell me what you and other faculty members have found works and does not work with ESL learners.
8. Please give a few examples of the type of feedback ESL students have provided. Probe: Feedback on content, language level, teaching and evaluation strategies.
9. How might the preparatory course curriculum better accommodate ESL learners wanting to pursue studies in the college's Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs?
10. Please tell me what you feel might be some practical measures in accommodating ESL learners wanting to pursue studies in the college's Practical Nursing or Pharmacy Technician programs? Probe: What do you think are some barriers to accommodating ESL learners in these programs?

Ending Question:

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Part 3: Script

Thank you for your participation and insights. I will be e-mailing you the transcript soon. This is to give you the opportunity to review your comments and make any changes, additions or clarifications. If you could e-mail back to me your comments within a couple of weeks that would be helpful. Once again, I will ensure your confidentiality by using pseudonyms in the transcripts. I will also keep all data locked in my home office and will erase the tape, shred the transcript, and delete electronic files within two years from now.

The final thesis report will be available through Brock University's Instructional Resource Center and at Gibson Library.

I would also like to present my study's results at a college conference or workshop. Thanks again, and I'll be in touch.

Appendix B

Focus Group Guide

Masters Thesis Title: Perceptions, Policies, and Practices: Accommodating College ESL Learner Communication Needs

Participant Group: Student Focus Group (Same format for both groups)

Time:

Date:

Place:

Part 1: Script: So to review why I'm here, the purpose of this study is to explore, understand, and determine the communication needs of college ESL learners. The focal research question is: How can the Practical Nursing / Pharmacy Technician program most effectively accommodate (help / assist) ESL learners' communication needs?

Your ideas are very important. You, as ESL learners, can give me a clear picture of what it is like to be a college ESL learner in your program. Your ideas can help other ESL learners wanting to study in your program. Openly discussing this topic will help in addressing the communication skills needed by college ESL learners.

I have received permission from Brock University. That means that someone has reviewed the questions and the procedures and feels that you are protected.

All information you provide will be considered confidential. Your name will not appear in any final report or document. Everyone's ideas will be grouped together. This is a group interview, so I ask that you to respect your fellow participants by keeping all information that identifies or could identify a participant and his / her comments confidential.

I'm going to audio-tape record the interview, and an observer is here to help me take notes. She has signed an agreement of confidentiality.

You have a copy of the Informed Consent form. To remind you, you may withdraw (you may ask to be taken out of the study) from this study at any time during the interview, after it, and at any time before the study is completed. You may do so without penalty. I will immediately destroy any information gathered to that point.

Do you have any questions about the study?

I will ask questions, and I ask that each person respond to each question and then the whole group can continue discussing the question until I ask another question. And so on.

May I start recording? Let me now test the tape recorder.

Part 2: Questions

Introductory Question:

- Why did you choose to study this program at the college? Probe: how might this program help you live in Canadian society, get a job?

Key Questions:

1. Please tell me what you would tell a new ESL student about your program?

Probes: what are the good and bad points? What would you tell them about the placement process, the content, teaching style and grading?

2. Please tell me about how your language ability affects your success in the courses.

Probe: Do you feel it's harder for you than other learners? How much additional time do you spend preparing for your assignments because of your language ability?

3. Describe what the college could do to help you with your language needs.

Probes: Administration? Instructors? Content? Other courses? Other students?

Ending Question:

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Part 3: Script: Thank you for your participation and insights. I will be e-mailing you the transcript soon. This is to give you the opportunity to review your comments and make any changes, additions or clarifications. If you could e-mail your comments back to me within a couple of weeks that would be helpful. Once again, I will ensure your confidentiality by using pseudonyms (different names) in the transcripts. I will also keep all the information you've given me locked in my home office and will erase the tape, shred the transcript, and delete the electronic files within two years from now. The final thesis report will be available through Brock University's Instructional Resource Center and at Gibson Library.

Thanks again and I'll be in touch.

Let's raffle the gift certificate. Pick a slip from the bag. Do not look at it until everyone has a slip. If your slip says \$30 gift certificate, then you're the winner! Thanks everyone, and good luck with your studies!

Appendix C

Alignment of Research Questions and Themes

The following chart relates the study's research questions to the study's themes. The column titled 'Opportunities for ESL Learners' is shaded in grey to highlight that it is an emergent theme. The column titled 'Professional and Personal Reputation' is also shaded in grey to emphasize that the some of the ideas emerging from this theme do not fully relate to the research questions and, therefore, it is also an emergent theme. Note that a separate column for the theme 'Proposed Solutions' has not been added to this chart as the points in research questions #3 and #4 refer to proposed solutions.

Problem Statement	Themes:				
From the administrator, faculty member, and ESL learner perspective, how the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician college programs can more effectively accommodate ESL learners' communication needs.	Opportunities for ESL Learners	ESL Student Characteristics: Approaches to Learning and Social Roles	Communication Expectations Placed on ESL Students	Barriers to Successful Program Completion and Job Placement	Personal and Professional Reputation
Research Questions: 1. What are the communication needs of ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possible difficulty achieving professional success in Canada, but may achieve success in country of origin • Moving on to future studies in college or at university level • Attaining educational goals for personal gratification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Additional responsibilities • Weak oral, listening, and vocabulary skills • Possible learning disabilities • Transmission learning style • Struggles with cultural identity • Low self-esteem • Coping mechanisms to manage through difficult learning situations • Self-perception as ESL student 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-directed, responsible • Collaborative • Demonstrate deep learning • Communicate effectively in the classroom / professional context • Strong math skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural barriers • Learning difficulties • Difficulty finding co-op placement • Inability to pass certification exam • Maintaining employment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Graduate – product of programs and college. Administrators' concern for their professional reputation and for the programs' and college's reputation • Reputation of self as a learner • ESL learners do not see themselves as ESL

2. Are there any limitations in the ESL preparatory program currently in place for college ESL learners? If so, what are these limitations?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More emphasis required on building oral, listening, and vocabulary skills • Acknowledge and work with learning disabilities • Work with transmission learning style, but also encourage interactive methods of learning • Help learners understand how their cultural identity affects their learning • Assist ESL learners to recognize coping mechanisms when in difficult learning situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage self-direction and initiative • More collaborative learning required for ESL students to manage throughout the process • Activities and assignments which encourage application of knowledge (deep learning) • Encourage effective classroom / professional communication • Develop stronger math skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More emphasis required on building oral, listening, and vocabulary skills • Encourage working collaboratively • Help learners understand how their cultural identity affects their learning 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ESL learners do not see themselves as ESL • Acknowledge and work with learning disabilities • More emphasis required on building oral, listening, and vocabulary skills, particularly in discipline-specific content • Build confidence in ESL student to share ideas within the classroom
3. What kinds of curriculum and instructional accommodations should these programs consider in order to foster ESL learners' communication skills?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications course with ESL component • Presemester with an emphasis on professional vocabulary / content • Content-specific ESL/communications courses • Accessibility to knowledge • Build in communication skills in existing courses • Mandatory support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications course with ESL component • Presemester with an emphasis on professional vocabulary / content • Content-specific ESL courses • Mandatory support • Accessibility to knowledge • Audiovisual materials • Pre-/postlistening and reading activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications course with an emphasis on professional vocabulary and content • Presemester with an emphasis on professional vocabulary / content • Mandatory support • Accessibility to knowledge • Content-specific ESL courses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications course with ESL component • Presemester with an emphasis on professional vocabulary / content • Mandatory support • Content-specific ESL courses • Accessibility to knowledge • Build in communication skills in existing courses • Pre-/post listening and reading activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communications course with ESL component • Presemester with an emphasis on professional vocabulary / content • Mandatory support • Content-specific ESL/communications courses • Accessibility to knowledge
4. What kinds of organizational interventions are most effective in assisting college ESL learners in the Practical Nursing and Pharmacy Technician programs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase acceptance and program standards • Pretesting • Reduce class size • Longer semesters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reduce class size • Longer semesters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase acceptance and program standards • Pretesting • Reduce class size • Longer semesters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pretesting • Reduce class size • Longer semesters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase acceptance and program standards • Pretesting • Reduce class size • Longer semesters



**Brock
University**

Appendix D

Office of Research Services
Research Ethics Office

St. Catharines, Ontario, Canada L2S 3A1
T: 905-688-5550, Ext. 3035/4876 F: 905-688-0748

www.brocku.ca

DATE: July 24, 2007

FROM: Michelle McGinn, Chair
Research Ethics Board (REB)

TO: Denise Paquette-Frenette, Education
Chrisoula BENAK

FILE: 07-002 BENAK

TITLE: Accomodating College ESL Learner Communication needs

Michelle K. McGinn

The Brock University Research Ethics Board has reviewed the above research proposal.

DECISION: Accepted as clarified

This project has received ethics clearance for the period of July 24, 2007 to March 31, 2008 subject to full REB ratification at the Research Ethics Board's next scheduled meeting. The clearance period may be extended upon request. ***The study may now proceed.***

Please note that the Research Ethics Board (REB) requires that you adhere to the protocol as last reviewed and cleared by the REB. During the course of research no deviations from, or changes to, the protocol, recruitment, or consent form may be initiated without prior written clearance from the REB. The Board must provide clearance for any modifications before they can be implemented. If you wish to modify your research project, please refer to <http://www.brocku.ca/researchservices/forms> to complete the appropriate form **Revision or Modification to an Ongoing Application**.

Adverse or unexpected events must be reported to the REB as soon as possible with an indication of how these events affect, in the view of the Principal Investigator, the safety of the participants and the continuation of the protocol.

If research participants are in the care of a health facility, at a school, or other institution or community organization, it is the responsibility of the Principal Investigator to ensure that the ethical guidelines and clearance of those facilities or institutions are obtained and filed with the REB prior to the initiation of any research protocols.

The Tri-Council Policy Statement requires that ongoing research be monitored. A Final Report is required for all projects upon completion of the project. Researchers with projects lasting more than one year are required to submit a Continuing Review Report annually. The Office of Research Services will contact you when this form **Continuing Review/Final Report** is required.

Please quote your REB file number on all future correspondence.

MM/bb